

PASTEL DRAWING

TAGORE
THE PROPHET OF PEACE

by

R I PAUL

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LAHORE

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IN SEARCH OF PEACE

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—*SAROJINI NAIDU*

THE Victorian Age was the age of peace Sand wiched between the stormy times that preceded and the still stormier decades that followed it may be looked upon as the Golden Age of the present civilisa tion

Let us go back to the early period of the nineteenth century when the history of the Bengal Renaissance was in the making The sixteenth century is parti cularly known for the revival of art and letters under the influence of classical models in the Western Europe The course adopted by the Bengal Renaissance Movement in the nineteenth century was surprisingly similar to that of Europe in the sixteenth century

Of course similar efforts conclude in a similar manner and similar actions have similar reactions The history of mankind has preserved thousands of such instances that go a long way to bear testimony to this fact The history of the Ancient India is dyed red with the blood of the Drivadians so ruthlessly shed by the Aryans The other chapter of the history opens with the murder and massacre of the Aryan the tyrants by the foreigners The Brahmins pu

the Sudras with hot melted lead in their ears the Brahmins were disgraced and disregarded by the Mohammedans The Mohammedans with the avarice of victory plundered the freedom of the world the Mohammedans were compelled to be on their knees before the superior might In the same way when we look into the pages of the history of Europe we find that the Roman emperors while riding their horses used to put their feet on the shoulders of the submissive sovereigns but the time came when Romans had to suffer for the oppression and barbarity they had rendered to other nations intoxicated with their imperialistic pride kingly grandeur and grand civilisation The invisible hand of Nemesis gave such a heavy slap on the majestic face of the Old Rome that the Roman imperialism was obliged to knock out its true nature—the mockery of civilisation

Similarly we can take the case of an individual a group a nation or a country and can very confidently say that Nature according to its unchangeable principle does not exempt any party from getting proper reward or retaliation for its good deeds or misdoings

Just in the same manner efforts put forth for the right cause produce good results though at one time at an early stage and at the other at a later one In accordance with the law of Nature the Renaissance Movement of Europe brought out the best results awakening the people of Europe to a new life Exactly the same law was applicable to the results of the Renaissance Movement of Bengal

To the West the shock was given by the concussion of the Arabic civilisation and the faith of Islam The insensibility of the intellectual sufferings of Europe—a visible insignia of the Dark Ages—turned into the sense of reason This shock was the foreshadow of the intellectual progress in Europe There happened afterwards the revival of the Latin and Greek antiquities giving rebirth to Latin and Greek art and culture The shock was also followed by a new interpretation of the Christian Scriptures Both revival and interpretation acting together formed the

full Reformation and Renaissance

To the East the shock was given by the concussion of the Western civilisation which infu ed something uncommon and new in the East helpir g forward its remarkable rebirth There happened afterwards the movement for bringing back into vogue the Sanskrit clas ics—the treasures of the early Aryan Age The shock was also followed by the reformation from within of the ancient Hindu mythology Both revival and reformation acting together gave prominence to the Bengal Renaissance Movement led by the most enthusiastic leader—Rabindranath Tagore

During the time of Sir William Bentinck Lord Macaulay planned for introducing the English language as the medium of instruction in India His famous minute was written in 1835 In support of his scheme he himself said that it should be their endeavour as far as possible to create such a mass in India as would do the intermediary work by conciliation and com promise between them and millions of subjects In Bengal it was then a burning question whether the introduction of the English language in accordance with Macaulay s minute should be encouraged or not It was on of the most momentous question ever discussed und r the sun Perhaps one may doubt the importance of the question but no wise brain aware of the issues involved not for Bengal only but for the whole of the East will find any exaggeration in the significance of the question

It was no less than Macaulay s folly to disregard Sanskrit classics and Bengali literature He was guilty in the eyes of our countrymen of pouring contempt upon the Sanskrit language Nevertheless Macaulay had the upper hand people s voice fell on deaf ears However the people received a shock Their sentiments were aroused and they were naturally compelled by their conscience to go deep into the Sanskrit cl ssics and there came the hour of revival

Prof Wilson in 1853 while delivering a speech before the Parliament expressed his opinion about Macaulay s minute saying that in reality they had

created a mass of the English knowing people who had no sympathy with their countrymen and if they had had any it was of no avail to them

In a way Prof Wilson was right Just after the introduction of the English language the new life which first appeared led to the shaking of old customs and ancient convictions and the social sphere was disturbed to an utmost extent The people were thrown in a vast ocean and they had to strain every nerve to reach the shore They needed from without a shock and they had got it They struggled to get out of the commotion At this stage Wilson s insight proved practically at fault Quite reverse to his expectations the English knowing people proved true sympathisers of their countrymen and every unit of their sympathy was of real use to their motherland The language which can express most modern and scientific ideas immensely increased the potentiality of our Indian vernaculars

Raja Rammohan Roy was the one prominent personality whose noble presence played a great part at this juncture in saving Bengal from misfortune His self command distinctive character and tutelary spirit singled him out among his contemporaries His prophetic vision made him one to gauge quite accurately the force of every new current He also had the qualities to foresee the results of every movement and guide the people in his own way with an accuracy incapable of missing the mark Raja Rammohan Roy was not the least of an opportunist He could never tolerate to wait for dead men s shoes He was rather of the belief that chances are always at our threshold and we are to pick them up He paved out a new road vehemently promoting the new Western learning and helping forward Macaulay s programme with all his est and zeal But his efforts put forth in this respect did not in any way correspond to Prof Wilson s version The best spirit of his remark able life was prone to fill the hearts of Bengalees with a tru reverence for the Indian past It would naturally l ad to the revival of the Sanskrit classics for the

Indian past was bright mostly with the same Taken in this sense Raja Rammohan Roy was the cro n of the revival movement Besides he never neglected his own vernacular the Bengali language rather recognised its full value by bringing it back into literary u e

Our Poet s father Maharshi Devendranath Tagore was the next prominent personality known for the literary revival in Bengal The Maharshi got his early education at the school founded by Raja Rammohan Roy and was influenced by the teachings of the latter received by him through his teachers in the school The Maharshi was same to Raja Rammohan Roy s kingdom of thought as Akbar was to Babar s kingdom of India The Raja rooted a plant deep in the soil of Bengal and the Maharshi watered it protected it and made it grow into a fruitful tree

The Maharshi enjoyed a life of eighty eight years During this long period of his life he ever remained busy with his Brahma Samaj work He personally went from place to place preaching the Brahma religion and establishing branches of the Brahma Samaj To him ancient India was the cradle of all that was pure in morals and religion He was a man says his son Satyendranath more deeply imbued than any one in modern times with the genuine spirit of the ancient rishis It is singular that the one field of religious inspiration which was foreign to him was the Hebrew Scriptures He was never known to quote the Bible nor do we find any allusion to Christ or his teachings in his sermons For him the Indian Scriptures sufficed His religion was Indian in origin and expression it was Indian in ideas and in spirit The Maharshi s religious character and moral strength gave spiritual light to that age with an eminence of its own His holy personal influence was immensely impressive and he was known as Maharshi not only among his Brahma Samaj circle but the title was given to him by universal consent Du ing the days of the collision of foreign and Indian civilisations his spiritual authority held his country close to its own historic past Raja

His indefatigable zeal for revival of ancient Indian culture accomplished more than any other of his contemporaries Bankim the celebrated novelist has been called the pioneer of the Bengal Renais ance Tagore may be called the high priest of this movement

Art comes easy to Rabindranath Highest art it has been said i unconscious and Rabindranath s art is undoubtedly unconscious It is said of him that a certain gentleman approached him to interpret a poem of his which had baffled his understanding for long and Tagore s retort was Ah! who knows what it means? He wrote through vision and his vision was quick and open Though not on purpose much of his works are replete with the gospel of his father in his own inimitable simple style

It was not more than three decades back that he came into the lime light Even his countrymen did not recognise his genius before he was lionised by the West with the Nobel Prize His early poems are subjective but the subjective tone is replaced by the prophetic one in his later verse No longer he sits in the remote corner to enjoy him elf the ravishing delights of Nature He is out to rub houlders with the common humanity to share their lot of sorrows and sufferings to face the pangs of hunger and poverty to make a bold stand against the icy hand of death without any fear and realise God in his contemplations

Fame and honour did not make him intoxicated He never forgot his humbler friends He was never indifferent to them even when at the highest rung of the Fortune s ladder

He drew his inspiration from the soil of Bengal and in turn his songs and poems inspired enchanted and guided the Bengalee youth Most of his compositions are symbol of the rising hopes and aspirations of his own people He has filled their hearts with rosy dreams of Golden Bengal Bengal is the acknowledged land of song and music and through Rabindranath s influence all the song and music has been directed at realising that dream

The Poet is a man of vision and in his sub conscious mind there is a sacred sense of awe that God has visited his people and through his music and literature he has filled the mind of his people with this awe Verily India retains even today her living faith in the Unseen

For a true understanding of the temperament and cha acter of Rabindranath Tagore it is well worth to recall the environment in wh ch he was nourished and brought up When his father the Maharshi was present in the house all the household became still and hushed as if anxious not to disturb his meditations

He was quite young when his mother died Her face when he saw it for the last time was calm and beautiful in death and awakened in him no sense of childish terror it did not excite even wonder all eemed so peaceful It was much later that he was conscious of death s real meaning

In his childhood he was too much given to lone liness He remained away from his father yet his father s influence was the deepest on Tagore s life To him he was literally the founta n head of inspiration When the icy hand of death had bereft him of mother s fond love he was kept in the charge of the servants of the household He would sit day fter day in his room and peeping through the window would roam in a world of imagination

Since his infancy he vorshipped Nature To him a mere piece of cloud coming up in the blue sky would make feel with joy Nature supplied him the food for his imagination in his leisure He never felt the lone liness of his early life To h m Nature was a lo ing companion that never forsook him and always revealed to him new treasures of beauty and joy

He would get up from sleep early in the morning and would roam about in l is garden and the meanest flower that grew there filled him with thoughts too deep for tears A mere breath in the open sunshine would awake him to new l fe The trees green grass the chirping of sparrows all conspired to thrill l im through and through

The Poet realised the inner beauty of the soul one fine morning in the Free School Lane Calcutta He felt as if the thick veil of ignorance was rent asunder with a dramatic suddenness His mind was unusually calm and reposeful He was lost in watching the sunrise from the Free School Lane All of a sudden he felt dazzled of an inner vision The veil was rent the darkness had gone He felt that everything was self luminous every noise a perfect rhythm every creature saturated with godhood He realised that there was unity behind all diversity He beheld one behind many The distinction of form and colour was lost Every person even the tiniest of living beings was invested with the glory and freshness of a dream A solemn glee possessed his soul He was wrapped in meditation His heart was full of love and gladness born of it

Then he went to the remote places he scaled the dizzy heights of the Himalayas in search of such ethereal joy such inner vision of things but he sadly failed He felt ever since that this world is brimful with joy and glory visible to those who have pierced the thick veil of ignorance The thick wall of sorrow vanishes like a cloud in the radiant light of love Love transforms the most commonplace thing to a thing of beauty and joy It seemed as if his capacity for love was challenging all limitations He loved everything great as well as small He saw his God where the pathmaker was breaking stones where the tiller was tilling the ground He loved the labourers whose garments were covered with dust and faces withered with fatigue

This ecstatic mood possessed him for several days on end His brothers decided to have a pleasure trip to Darjeeling Tagore accompanied them He thought he might have a greater thrill of this blissful experience—oneness at the core of all things He expected to find more severity in the height of the busy thoroughfare of the [illegible] that all along he had [illegible] He wrongly thought

that truth could be got from outside The majestic and lofty peaks could whisper no truth into his eager ears but the concourse and noise of people in the Sadar Street had done that The Almighty Lord His wonder works He works alone unfathomed and unknown He can open the whole universe in the narrow space of a single line He can exhibit the whole world in a grain of sand can hold infinity in the palm of your hand and eternity in an hour

The volume of his poems entitled *Morning Songs* is the expression of Poet s ecstatic period—his first vi ion He is impatient to realise th beauty of the world But for lack of practical experience his lyrics though full of imagination are not intimately related to common human experience

Circumstances however so conspired that it was no longer possible for him to live in an enchanted land of dream and ima ination His father soon gauged the sensibilities of the poetic genius of his son and felt that his intellectual development was tending to be come lop-sided if he did not rub shoulders with the practical men of the world With this end in view he sent him away to supervise the family estate right on the bank of the Ganges This change was a double blessing to the youthful Tagore Firstly it brought him into contact with moral life of Bengal Day after day he moved and talked with the native village folk and dealt with the practical affairs He began to un derstand and appreciate their rising hopes and also the fears that were looming large before their eyes He awoke to the pangs of poverty and mi ery He had never understood these monsters before The second advantage that he derived from the char ge of environ ment was that he had a fine scope to commune with Nature He could find no better place th n the sacred bank of the Ganges for Nature study The calm and tranquillity inspired him to ecstatic heights in thought and rhyme He would ro m from village to village in his boat and breathe fresh life

Most of his time he pas ed in silence For many days at a stretch he would not exchange a single word

any living being till his voice became thin and weak through lack of use During his boat excursions he had the chance to study and converse with the village folk to watch their custom and traditions to share their joys and sorrows and feel their wants and limitations This gave him enough material to take to short story writing Many of the short stories written in those days are excellent and some think these to be superior to many of his well known lyrics

Next phase in the life of Tagore begins since he went to Santiniketan from Shilaidah When he was supervising his father s estate he was feeling restless like a young eagle to fly away and find wider scope for his talents The monotonous life at Shilaidah was only a long period of preparation

As time passed on he was becoming aware of an inner call to give up the present work and dedicate his life to the service of his country At last he could not control this passion He first came to Calcutta and then to Santiniketan and decided to found a chool The difficulties to realise th s aim were many The main was of raising funds He spared nothing that belonged to him He sold his books his copy right and everything that he could lay hand on but the task he had assigned for himself demanded much more than he could give For a time it appeared that the mission he had cho en would fail but he carried on the struggle and the trials and tribulations that beset his way worked a great and wholesome change into the life of the Poet These very obstacles proved to be the birth throes of a greater man in him They worked a great change in his own inner life

At forty his wife died He had scarcely recovered from this rude shock when his daughter developed symptoms of consumption Her precarious condition compelled him to give up school and nurse and tend her but all his efforts proved in vain She succumbed to illness leaving gap in the Poet s sensitive heart never to be filled again But the worst had yet to be The Poet s youngest son upon whom he bestowed more care than others fell suddenly ill with cholera and

died within a few days

Death had preyed upon three of his dearest ones within a small interval but made herself the loved companion of the Poet—no longer an object of fear but a bosom friend He had realised by this so-called calamity that death was a great blessing in disguise It was his belief that not even an atom in this universe is lost He was aware of a sense of completen ss To him death in the last analysis was not a calamity but a perfection

It was during this period of travail that *Gitanjali* was written The original was written in Bengali I wrote these poems the Poet said for myself I did not think of publishing them when I was writing He has attempted to express fullness of human life in its its beauty as perfection These lyrics are full of subtlety of rhythm of untranslatable delicacies of colour of metrical inventions The work of a supreme culture they yet appear as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes

The last phase of his life is that of the traveller the pilgrim He began to keep indifferent health and was compelled to set out to Europe for a change But the outward change worked a spiritul change as well He felt a new spiritual unfoldment

As soon as he left the Indian shores he realised that his own soul was overgrow ng the limitations imposed by outside factors He imagined himself a voyager to the open road I to the emancipation of the self I to the realisation of Love

In a letter to Deenabandhu Andrews dealing with the meeting of the conflicting races of the world and the removal of colour prejudice he observed that the meeting of the races on equal footing was the greatest question that concerned the fate of Homo Sapiens and that no sacrifice would be too great to solve this vexing problem once for all and achieve the victory of God in Man

Oversea travels had completely changed his out look He began to face questions and problems of international interest He cast aside the narrow

nationalism which had been the dominant and the mos insistent feature of most of his poetry and songs The philo opher was awake in the Poet He began to weave a philosophy of his life and thoughts and interpret the de per meaning of life It should not however be construed from the above that his lyrical zeal had cooled down by this time He had been pouring his musical strains till the very last day of his life

The *Gitanjali* has resulted in bringing the East and the West close together in a common fellowship and understanding The Poet has been able to bring about a remarkable synthesis of culture of the East and the West To achieve success in this field in the face of so much racial prejudices and religious conflicts is no mean achievement

The coming generations will hail him as an angel of peace and goodwill towards mankind and by following in his footsteps shall so behave towards one another that struggle and strife will become a thing of the past



TAGORE IN MARCH 1941

II

THE PATRIOT IS BORN

You th why
I d h ld b f
—*WILL DURANT*

THIS land of ours is no sand bank thrown up by some rec nt caprice of earth It is a stately growth with roots striking deep through the centuries Nations have a history as well as a geography They live and grow not by the forces of wind and rain sun and stars but by the passions and ideals which animate them Any one who has studied and meditated on the ancient classics of this country will testify to their peculiar greatne s their power to yield new meanings and their inexhaustible value as a criterion of present day modes of life

Rabindranath Tagore was the veteran of the Eastern culture He was proud of the Indian past and with all his est and zeal awakened in the people the desire to live like a free cultured nation

Rabindranath saw the light of the day in 1861 He was born and brought up when the echo of the Indian War of Independence of 1857 was resounding his environment His father Maharshi Devendranath Tagore although known for his zeal for social reform was out and out a nationalist in his outlook Maharshi was a prominent member of the British India Associa tion for his social eal Sir Richard the then Governor of Bengal referred this institution as a society of free thinkers and ruthless critics of the British Government Shri Rajnarayan Basu the maternal grandfather of Shri Aurbindo Ghosh while remarking in his autobiography about the strong nationalist views of D Babu observes that he had never been keen to

his influence and eloquence to raise funds for the defence committee organised to fight the case of Lok manya Tilak The people of Bengal are known for their taking prominent part in the public demonstra tions held to protest against the arrest of the Lokmanya and the improper attitude of the British Government The stir was the natural outcome of the impressive and inspiring writings of the Poet

When section 124 A (sedition) came into force he started a strong agitation against it in Bengal His poem *Kanthrodh* which was written in those days enables us to witness the reaction on the Poet s heart of this outrageous law

It was just in those days that plague spread over different parts of the country and the Poet tried his best to make arrangements to soothe the sufferers The Poet said that if the Government wanted that there should be no unrest in the country they should change their course of action and harness all recourses in their power to drive away the epidemic

In 1902 Lord Cur on charged Indians of being given to falsehood Rabindranath did not spare him and refuted the charge in no uncertain terms In his *Bang Dar han* he proved by recounting instances of the malacious propaganda of the English against the Boers that that was a common practice of the English unworthy of a civilised nation The Poet quoted Herbert Spencer in support of his arguments

In 1903 poems were chiselled out in quick succes sion by his fascile pen all purporting that injustice must be resisted and that the aggressor must be paid in his own coin

As early as 1904 he drew up a complete scheme for the reorganisation of our villages with the revival of cottage industries to help remove the poverty of the masses with the co-operation of the peasant him self His idea of national regeneration through his comprehensive scheme of rural reconstruction now being worked out at Sriniketan is undoubtedly his great contribution to constructive politics

His well known work *Suadeshi Samaj* was published

in 1904 It sums up the Poet s political ideology of those days

He delivered his speech on *Boycot* on 7th August 1905 in the open session of the Indian National Congress with a view to encouraging Indian goods

In 1905 to demonstrate the unity of the Bengal province the *Raksha Bandhan Festival* was observed with great grandeur and glory For the occasion Rabindranath wrote a beautiful poem entitled *Rakhi* which was recited in a large procession On 16th Octobe a grand public meeting was conducted under the presidentship of Anandmohan Basu the president of the Madras Congress Committee In this meeting Rabindranath acted as interpreter On the dispersal of the meeting the audience started in procession singing songs and shouting slogans This procession was led by the Poet who was singing a song of his own and the processionists were reciting in chorus after him

In the Congress session of 1913 held at Calcutta Lokmanya Tilak proposed the name of Dr Ann e Besant for presidentship Rabindranath strongly supported him He himself was elected chairman of the reception committee In this session he recited a poem entitled *India s Prayer* On the other day his play *Post Office* was staged The audience including Lokmanya Tilak Annie Besant M M Malaviya and many other notable patriots appreciated the Poet s patriotic spirit

His artistic genius was in full bloom those days His poems full of lofty patriotism are unique and unsurpassable They are sure to leave their mark in the literary annals of India He was a pioneer in the cause of national education He took sides with Suren dranath and opposed Sir B Fuller That he was a man of practical imagination was apparent from his work in those days

When terrorism began to make its way in Bengal Tagore withdrew himself from the political field But at heart he was a staunch nationalist all along The British Government always looked upon him with

shorn of all special distinctions by the side of those of my countrymen who for their so called insignificance are liable to suffer degradation not fit for human beings And these are the reasons which have painfully compelled me to ask Your Excellency with due deference and regret to relieve me of my title of Knighthood which I had the honour to accept from His Majesty the King at the hands of your predecessor for whose nobleness of heart I still entertain great admiration

This act of the Poet is not only a proof of his lofty patriotism but goes a long way to make it clear to the aggressors that in spite of centuries of subjection the sons of Mother India still have place in their hearts *for the spirit of freedom and that when they are* pressed with high handedness they will not spare any distinction to be sacrificed in the name of their Great Mother

Indians were those days cursing Sir Michael O Dwyer General Dyer and others but the Poet by relinquishing his title acknowledged what Lala Lajpat Rai has said in the following words In my humble judgment it is the system which needs cursing if that can give any satisfaction to the persons aggrieved The men are the mere tools of circumstances They may overdo a *thing* but so long as they are told that the mainte nance of the system is the main thing and that it has to be done at any cost their fault is only secondary

In 1920 Gandhiji started non co operation move ment It was Rabindranath who first conceived the programme of encouragement to the use of Indian goods and *boycott of the foreign ones*

There existed a deep and abiding mutual love and reverence between Gandhiji and Rabindranath Rabindranath did not have so much eal for khadi and charkha but for Gandhiji these were the articles of faith In spite of this variance the two agreed *on the* principle of non co operation

In his youthful days it was the express opinion of Rabindranath Tagore that it was a good thing to start country wide agitation But agitation he said should

be directed towards our own country rather than to the foreign Government and that when the people realised the necessity of civic rights the deliverance from the British yoke of bondage would not be a distant dream

Although his Muse underwent a revolution yet there had not been the slightest change in his political outlook His subsequent writings especially his reply to Miss Rathbone s letter give us a peep into his mind

I should have thought he said that the decent Britisher would at least keep silent at these wrongs and be grateful to us for our inaction but that he should add insult to injury and pour salt over our wounds passes all bounds of decency

Through the official British channels of education in India he reveals had flowed to our children in schools not the best of English thought but its refuse which has only deprived them of a wholesome repast at the table of their own culture

A nation is always judged by the eminence of its great men India which gave birth to Rabindranath the greatest man of this age can claim her due share of respect and recognition among all n tions Rabindra nath was a towering genius who discovered all the main problems of humanity and the methods of u p lifting it to a higher plane With the lamp of his personality he approached the great wisdom of India as embodied in the Upanishads and the past heritage of our culture H was a patriot in the true sense of the word He was ealous not only for the freedom of his own country but for the rights of humanity Un like the modern patriots who have been m de to aim at their gaining superiority to their fellow beings and their using all means fair and foul in their power with the purpose to rule over others he hated this belief the insanity in honour of which the man has suffered division and dispersion at the cost of complete unity and has blindly sacrificed candour and co operation resulting in disturbance of the peace of the world His patriotism never lay in violently capturing the territories of the weak nations He was rather pro

that his countrymen did not possess the spirit of aggression He was not a man of India alone He was a great torch bearer whose business it was to illuminate the future path of the unfortunate and weary nations of the world To them all he showed through the burning experiences of his own intuition the true heritage of mankind for the salvation of humanity

Rabindranath stands before us a true lover of humanity The elegance of the soul of a cosmopolitan is too dear to him to accept the limitations imposed by space and time or even by the geographical boundaries

III

QUEST FOR SELFHOOD

M t wh h f l h
fi y wh h d d
h d th to h m

—*RABINDRANATH TAGORE*

TAGORE blew the great trumpet of peace in the war worn world *Having discovered the fountain* head of eternal tranquillity in his own soul he moved heaven and earth to quench the desire of the blood thirsty world with *the elixir of everlasting peace* Tagore summed in himself a momentous era and has been the mouthpiece of great ideals The mission of Tagore has been indeed the mission of India He was a glorious internationalist whom Mother India brought forth out of her womb in a travail of political upheaval He was not merely a versifier building an ivory tower in a rose garden Practical idealism was the golden thread of his nature His words had an electrical effect even on the *hearts of the war* lords whom the fresh red wine of blood has made so giddy as to be indifferent to the happiness of others

Rabindranath Tagore *has been* well described as the Plato of his age To the world at large he is known only as a mystic poet of India But in many *other fields he was even greater* He was a *great* short story writer Many of his short stories rank with the world s classical literature He was a novelist *of repute In the field of fiction Tagore is one of* the three greatest novelists that Bengal has produced He was a well known social critic an eminent journalist *and a shrewd essayist He has done a yeoman s service* in carrying the torch of education among the millions of his country Above all he was a

a thinker and a religious preacher As a social reformer his work will be appreciated by many generations to come Of course he was a first rank political thinker He was caught up unaware in the whirl of turbulence which Delhi London pivot is generating But his political achievement was not the child of blind sentiment It was based on cold logic He did not like to adhere himself to any one single party creed or dogma He never subscribed to the conventional kind of views on men manners and matters He was a poet in the truest sense of the term a composer and a creator Towards the declining years of his life he surprised the world by producing some of the finest specimens of painting These have reserved for him a unique niche in the temple of fame The painters of Bengal acknowledge him as the fountain head of inspiration Verily he has been one of those few rich personages who left the world richer by their foot prints on the sands of time

In spite of an immense range of his deeds and doings he has been unflittered and whole As a matter of fact Rabindranath has been successfully struggling to realise himself through his manifold activities His life and achievements can be judged by the yard with which we measure Goethe and Shakespeare

Tagore is a romantic poet of the highest order And yet it would appear strange to a romanticist like Keats that Tagore should ply art for the sake of self realisation and not for its own ake And yet Tagore is not the first in this novel adventure A tradition says Yeats where poetry and religion are the same thing has passed through the centuries gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and of the noble

The great unifying force in Rabindranath s life is the search for a formula of universal happiness For that one noble goal he has burnt the candle of his life at both ends He tried many paths but his centre

of approach was one He did not care only for artistic self expression or personal enrichment All his activities are only part of a ceaseless quest for self realisation He was never in favour of leading the life of a hermit He wanted to live and breathe among men His faith in life on this earth is as unshakable as his faith in life to come In different eras of history there have been great men who ceased to take a continued inte est in life Tolstoy thought that death was the most baffling dilemma of life Many a moralist has been much overawed by death But right vision has dawn d on the men of true spiritual temper like Tagore He sought refuge in contemplation Eternal beatitude lies in the he rt of all the good things of the world

Mystical faith has nothing to do with sterile brand of religiosity That makes men live in the Slough of Despond They turn upon life as certain fierce snakes are believed to turn upon each other Thus mysticism is a double edged knife It stands on the cross roads of awry pathways of hope and fea optimism and gloominess The mysticism of Tagore is a joyous creed It transforms the joy of life into a higher a purer and a more enduring form of joy It creates a mood of unworldly elation which tends to blunt the keen edge of the human joy of life It blanches its radiance as the sun does that of the moon It is only necessary to turn to St Francis Even the most childlike and sincere adoration of Nature can turn away the true mystic from voluntary abnegation of all the gracious things that the physical universe has to offer to us That one should say is the mystic way Rabindr nath Tagore is an exception to that rule He is a mystic and a humanist at the same time He has staunch faith in the life which is believed to lie beyond death

Rabindranath Tagore s philosophy of life h s anchored itself in the faith in an eternal existence It h s not fastened itself less exultantly to the existence which will be cut off by the unexplained mystery of death For all the strength of his faith in an aft r life he is a clinging trusting child of mother earth Her

supreme gift so far as the individual s memory is concerned comes but once to man He is unable to get over the fact that within the bonds of one birth and one death alone are we given the sole unbroken stretch of consciousness There alone we can feel experience enriching previous experience tint laid on tint

That is what gives the poems of Tagore a great humane touch and he ceases to be a mere mystic merry maker of light and colour Thus W B Yeats writes about *Gita jali* in his eminent introduction

I have carried the manuscript of these translations about me for days reading it in railway trains or on the top of omnibuses and in restaurants and I have often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved me

The subtle philosophy of Tagore s mind has cast its indelible stamp on his life and life work Without it one finds no key to the variety of his interests He values life He feels equally strongly its evanescence Therefore he has turned to life and the world with all the strength of his immense vitality He garners his harvest while it is day He has felt his way forward to each kind of activity that could contribute to the sum total of his being Like a creeper he spreads out his tendrils towards the sun He has gone about with his wand and struck at each source of life giving water From poetry to politics he has spread out the tentacles of his consciousness The whole world seemed to be of the very stuff of his own being There is something elemental and stark in this quest for selfhood

No wonder there is much of vegetable worship in the poetry of Tagore Like Wordsworth he is the high priest of Nature Angelic simplicity is the chief halo of Tagore s poetry His poems have an untranslatable delicacies of colour as we find in flowers The work of a supreme culture says Yeats they yet appear as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and rushes

In one of his letters Tagore compared himself to a plant on the newly emerging earth

I can very well remember ages ago when the young earth had just raised her head from her sea bath and was greeting that day s just risen sun I coming from where no one knows and carried on the crest of the first wave of life had shot up as a plant in her virgin soil Then it was that in this earth I first drank the light of the sun with my entire body under the blue sky I waved myself like a little child in blind but glad stirrings of life I hugged my earthy mother with all my roots and took my fill my flowers blossomed and my shoots came forth in unreasoning delight

It is notable that Tagore holds our mind spell bound while the European saints have ceased to hold our attention since the Renaissance We know says a great European writer that we must at least forsak the world and we are accustomed in moments of weariness or exaltation to consider a voluntary forsaking but how can we who have read so much poetry seen so many paintings listened to so much music where the cry of the flesh and the cry of the soul se m one forsake it harshly and rudely? What have we in common with St B rnard covering his eyes that they may not dwell upon the beauty of the lakes of Switzerland or with the violent rhetoric of the Book of Revelation ?

The entire body of Tagore s artistic intellectual and social activities is part of his quest for selfhood He is one of magic master minds in painting music or poetry Yet he does not throw aside gems of art for man s regard or disregard Rabindranath exactly remembers what milestone each of his works forms in the growth of h s personality This is a common happening with men of letters His studies go to form a personality no less than a book The most important product of study is not the book but the man This attitude is rare among creative artists

Rabindranath s versatility and eclecticism are ama ing They include activities rarely ever undertaken by a single individu l They also embrace emotional ethical and intellectual shades mutually destructive ,

Rabindranath s liberalism has not prevented him from giving one of the best expositions of Hindu conservatism Yet his contempt for Hindu con servatism as popularly practised is well known He has felt alternatively drawn towards nationalism and internationalism towards extreme aloofness as well as folk cultures and beliefs In certain of his short stori s he has shown himself to be in perfect imaginative contact with certain types of life

Versatility is one side of Rabindranath s quest for selfhood Yet he has all through his life been a rebel He his received his share of loyal devotion from a small band of followers Often he has voyaged alone in strange silences with his soul He has had to fight his way out through an environment stonily unsympathetic The bitterness of Rabindranath s struggle is owing to commonplaceness in the society in which he was born and had to work

He has not rhymed handily with his fellows Nor has he put his feet in shoes which were a little too large so that every foot could get into and get out of them The common man s search for selfhood bears no proportion to Rabindranath s So uncompromising so idealistic has he been He has driven himself hard But he has not trodden on the toes of the men among whom he has had to work Naturally they are not as sore as he himself is Rabindranath s struggle started with his school days Any other man would certainly have been left morally scarred by it There is in Rabindranath too a strain of dis illusioned bitterness Certain of his sentences rasp out a lack of charity about his fellow countrymen It hurts and rankles But these rare and passing moods do not mar the permanent courage of his nature That is due above everything else to the internal discipline of the man He has tempered on almost morbidly sensitive nature He tamed his anti social philosophy of life For one less chastened it would have been a sour e of untold agonies No one can say that Rabindranath has not suffered It is all too evident in his life and works For all that he has

gone through he has not succumbed

Rabindranath s anger is not for us Many have misunderstood him His pen his sword are re erved for a higher cause Against tyranny of every sort he has nursed a hatred He is lik a child made to suffer in silent un understood anguish He ha hated cruelty with all the strength of his masculine hatred It is only against injustice that he has all along been the great rebel But no that word does him an injustice He has been more than a rebel he has been a fighter a fighter without fear and favour

Thus the rhymer of divine songs dedicates his life to the Creator and his creation The last verse of the last poem in *Gitanjali* aptly sums up Tagore s ideals of self realisation

> *Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain n sts let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutat on to thee*

IV

THE GREAT WORLD SOUL

Th d ta l d f t f h tory h h th b ttl g ou d f th l d t my pro I m g r my lf d m t t d b th t th t om f th f om th Hou f S g Wh th t f d l l t fi w f m th E st d f m th Il g t m gl h m qu s m p fou d h rmo y f me g t d l gl t my oul

—RABINDRANATH TAGORE

LET us for a while think of the significance Tagore had in his personality in his poetry in his art in his music that he was so commonly adored so respectfully honoured and so universally loved

He was born in Bengal he was nurtured in the traditions of Bengal he spoke the language of Bengal Why then are his works enshrined in the hearts of millions of human beings of the world? What is the secret? What is the reason?

The secret is his inner self his inner light his deeper insight that could at once probe into unfathom able reality and for the emotional sincerity of his mind Throughout his vast output of poetry short stories and philosophy and miscellaneous writings he always swings back to the ever recurring refrain —refrain of the ideal unity the fulfilment of the human soul through the Divine and the urge for emancipation of the fettered soul by doing away with the disruptive passions which tear gap in our vision of the One and create isolation in our self from the universal humanity

Even a casual student of his biography will feel that he chose his religion through a process of gradual growth and not through inheritance or importation

He was born in a family which since long had been pinning their faith on the teachings of the *Upan shadas* and consequently developing a sort of monotheistic religion In his early life religion did not captivate his heart at all He was too sensitive to accept any school of religion on authority All dogmatic creeds repelled him

He could not persuade himself to imagine that he had a religion simply because all tho e whom he loved and trusted believed in its value He was therefore brought up in an atmosphere of freedom of thought and action No creed could appeal to him that had its sanction in the authority of some scripture His mind was never influenced by the teaching of anv organised body of worshippers Even in his early years he was meditative and susceptible to scenic beauties Every phase of landscape seascape and cloudscape inspired him to read into the riddle of the Unknown The torrid fierceness of the burning sun th blessedness of the welcome rain the bright ness of the clear sky the incarnate fury of the storm the lov liness of tropical summer noon and the pleasant sight of the morning sunrise filled his mind wit thoughts too d ep for tears

In short his religion was a poet s religion—neither that of an orthodox man of piety nor that of a theologian The beauty of the visible world struck his prismatic imagination and dissolved into rainbow colours tl e very personality of the singer melted into his song until he ceases to be a man and becomes a voice a lyric inc rnate

It was not until he was eighteen that he had the first trance of religious experience—a vision of the One One day he was watching the silent sunrise behind the dewy veil of autumn morning his mind was serene and enraptured as never before Suddenly he felt as if the mist of ignorance had thawed into the morning light and revealed the inner beauty of the world The thick veil of ignorance was rent asunder and all things and men assumed looks He was conscious of an ineffable

super personal world of man The trance lasted for four days On the first day of this sudden awakening of the soul he wrote a poem entitled *Awakening of the Waterfall*

Through this poem the Poet depicts his vision by an analogy of a waterfall The waterfall suffers the tortures of aloofness until it adheres to its individuality and remains in its ice bound isolation Suddenly it is illumined and touched by the sun which exhorts it to merge its little individuality and seek a continual union with the sea It bursts into a cataract of freedom and seeks its finality After a few days the vision passed away and all things and all men faded into the light of the common day

Years later when he was in charge of his father s estate he had another vision of this kind One fine evening when he had disposed of the ordinary work of the day and was peeping through his window at the market place welcoming the sudden shower of rain he felt that his world of experience which had baffled his understanding before was initiating him into its deeper meaning His mental exaltation was like that of a man who ultimately reach s his destination after facing many a storm and mist which had slackened his pace and narrowed his vision All things became luminous with truth He found that everything was in a state of flux but tending to reach the same One Goal

These successive mystical experiences filled the youth with the conviction that there must be some being who was guiding him and his world and was seeking His best expression in all his experiences He felt that this very Being was working with and through him towards the process of creation This gave him a great joy—this idea of mystery of a meeting of the two in a creative comradeship The sting of his bygone sorrows was lost as he had found his religion at last It was the religion of man in which the infinite became defined in humanity and came close to him so as to need his love and co operation

He was blessed with a subtle sense of mystery

which on analysis may be found to be a complex emotion compounded of awe in the presence of the Unknown wonder in the presence of the known and an exquisite response to the manifestations of beauty wherever they may be found that we may call for want of a better world—rapture His unusual sense of wonder gave him a niche into the depth of existence He gave up his scholastic studies because he did not want to keep away from the world In the school he felt like a bird in a cage confined to the four walls of the alma mater This will perhaps explain the meaning of hi religion He never wanted to lose contact with the world which was permeated with a subtle touch of relationship and which added to the value of his own being

In his youth Rabindranath came in possession of a collection of lyrical ballads composed by the saints of the Vaishnava sect He was so much moved by these love poems He would often speak on universal love and freedom and say My heart is not mine to give to one only it is given to many Through these words he definitely gave the message of unity in diversity for again he says The Lord is in me the Lord is in you is life is in every seed At another instance he explains his implication of freedom in the true sense of the term I am able to love my God because He gives me freedom to deny Him From this source spring all his thoughts of universal love and freedom and he would preach in the words of Lord Krishna

> There is true knowledge Learn thou it is this
> To see One Changeless Life in all the lives
> And in the Separate One Inseparable
> (Th S g C l t l)

He sings of love that ever flows through innumerable hindrances between man and his Creator the eternal relation which has the relationship of mutual dependence for a fulfilment that needs perfect union of individuals and the Universal

The lover in his sens is the Supreme L whose touch we experience in all our relations

of universal love comes to the temple gate he who loves reaches the shrine You can do good consciously or unconsciously to a vicious man or a mean person but you cannot love him unless you follow the Poet with a staunch belief in his sayings the Lord is in me the Lord is in you as the life is in every seed You can do good to a diseased mind—a lunatic run amuck—by avoiding the use of force against his brute might but your good devoid of love cannot mend the wrong doer If you ay I shall not use force and stick to it merely because you think that the use of force is violent and not good you certainly misunderstand the implication of universal love and non violence There must be within you an upwelling of love and pity towards the wrong doer When there is that feeling it will express itself through some action It may be a sign a glance even silence But such as it is it will melt the heart of the wrong doer and check the wrong

The world is the creation of the Almighty The Almighty is within me the Almighty is within you the Almighty is within he within the mallest of the flowers within every particle of the dust So if you feel you must love God you must love His creation

One who opens his eyes and tries earnestly to see the world to him the world puts off its mask of vast ness and becomes small as one thing as one kiss of the eternal This is what Tagore has preached through his poetry This is the brightest ray of the Sun which had risen to give light to us through his message of universal love the message of unity in diversity This is the feeling that Blake has crystallised in the lines

To see a world in a grain of sand
And a Heaven in a wild flower
Holding infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour

So the true lover in the full sum of the word is one who knows there is unity under diversity at the centre of all existence

Tagore says The fish in the water is silent the

animal on the earth is noisy the bird in the air is singing

But man has in him the silence of the sea the noise of the earth and the music of the air

Or in other words the Poet explains that the man is the masterpiece of God s creation

He further says Men are the children of light Whenever they fully realise themselves they feel their immortality

Or in other words the Poet says that God has created the man after Him

The human love therefore is symbolic to Div ne love It is governed by similar laws and gives rise to similar re ults

To love one s ownself is also the same as to love another person because love in both cases is the human love Such a lo e exerci ed by the lover w th the consciousness of the immortality of h is being goes to prove the self suffic ency of the lover And none is self sufficient except God And none is immortal except God But the man is self sufficient the man is immortal and so the man is God Truly the man is God if he is conscious that h is God—as was Mans ir as was Sh mas

Love is another name for what the Poet calls the truth of h iman unity We have our greatest mo ments of delight when we merge and realise our selves in others This is the d finition of love This love bear proof of the One whole from which emerge m ny and which is th final truth of man Love is the great magici n which clothes the bare ness of earth with the glory of Summer Love and self surrender are es ential for success for releasing us from the sole monarchy of hunger of the growling voice snarling teeth and tearing claws from the do-minance of the limited material means the source of cruel envy and ignoble deception

Love brings about del verance of our conscious-ness from the ill sory bond of separateness of self It kindles our hearts and illumines the human w with a light that never was on ea [illegible]

Says the Poet Our union with a Being whose activity is world wide and who dwells in the heart of humanity cannot be a passive one In order to be united with Him we have to divest our work of selfishness and become *Visua karma* (the world worker) we must work in all In Buddha s words he would say

Above you below you on and all around you keep on the whole world your sympath and immeasurable loving thought which is obstruction without any wish to injure without enmity

It may b observed in this connection that Buddha s conception of infinite was not the unbounded cosmic activity but the infinite whose meaning is the positive ideal of goodness and love which cannot be otherwise than human According to him no state of *Nirvana* is attainable by the cultivation of negative virtues but by the removal of all barriers to love The self must rise above all trivialities and realise the truth which is love itself which links us with the rest of the humanity through the bonds of sympathy and service

When Buddha had preached his gospel to the chief among his disciples one of them ro e up and asked All along you have nowhere mentioned about God about the original cause of existence Should we then take that there is no God? Buddha s quick and unequivocal retort was I do not say that there is no God but I do not say that there is God but surely such a speculation goes beyond the human sphere as our goal It has nothing to do with man s *dharma* his inner nature in which love finds its utter fulfilment This is the ultimate truth that we need to know in this sojourn of life

Tagore defines religion as an attempt to reconcile the contradiction between the brute nature of man and his transcendental nature Prompted by his original cravings man is always after fulfilling his immediate vital needs—but he is also conscious of a supreme spirit deep within himself which often if not always runs in contrary direction to that of

the former Sometimes this contradiction is so great that o e nature has to be willingly sacrificed over the other A *mahatma* (great soul) sacrifices his vital needs and often courts death in order to express the supreme spirit within him Religion inspiresus to be constantly moving across the obstructive facts and realising our true self The desire for this higher life proimpts men to go through an endless struggle for survival

Let us now see what his idea of goodness is Goodness according to him is the f eedom of the self in the world of man as is love It is not suffi cient that the outer good work of man may continue to produce good results but at the same time the individual should be true in his goodness The inner perfection of his personality has its own immense value Goodness repre ents the detachment of our spirit from the exclusive ess of egoism We are good when we merge ourselves in the universal hu manity The value of good does not cons st in ome benefit for our fellow brothers but it lies in the emancipation of our spirit from its fetters of passion In order to be good we have to be true within not for worldly duties but for our spiritual fulfilment Life even in the face of stern reality of death de mands the fulfilment of several duties All the material phenomenon bends low before the might of death The greatest prosperity comes to an end the mightiest empi e in the cour e of tim dissolve into shreds The heyday of glory vanishes into emptiness and all our mortal relationships come to their end but we cannot afford to ignore our duty towards them If we behave as if all these things do not exist the iron grip of Nemesis will not spare us Any attempt to disreg rd the mortal bonds results in strengthening and prolonging them We cannot attain our goal by destroying our path In his moral life man has the sens of his obligation and his freedom at the same time and this is goodness H can attain *freedom in his mortal relationship by owning* sibility for community thus utilising its col

power for his own benefit He realises the freedom of the consciousness by feeling one with the rest of the humanity and can find fulfilment in life by consecrating it to the cause of truth and love

We cannot better conclude this thesis than by having a *bird s eye view* of the Poet s ideas on modern times Acquisition of money he holds has come to occupy a prominent place in society and has brought about a great change in our mental outlook It has called in aid of sc ence to get into our brain and affect our heart The modern age has become so money minded that saturated with the insatiable desire for its acquisition man has resorted to his primitive barbarism and an unscrupulous system of propaganda Money has evolved the cult of power as its ally The net result of this new outlook has been an ever growing unhappiness among the masses A large part of the masses have been deprived of their humanity The evil forces are rampant in the society and the ideal of wholeness has lost its cohesive force therefore it has been loosened into sections of fragmentary character Labour is a force so also is the capital so are the Government and the people so are the men and women This disruption has generated a great amount of mutual strife rivalry and competition and has lost the wholesomeness of creation

According to the Poet o ir present day education is producing a type of mind which is not conducive to the spiritual understanding of truth which is the ultimate reality of existence The reign of machine and of scientific method has dethroned spirituality from its niche and has reduced man to a homeless tramp The Western man coming after such a long voyage has only tried to exploit the Eastern spirituality for lust of material gain In modern civilisation the teeming multitudes of m n are being employed as tools for the accumulation of wealth and power and thus it has revealed man imperfectly for man s true expression does not consist in the fact that he is a power but that he is a spirit The result has been a s ething dis-

content in the individuals as also the races A sure disaster is looming large before their eyes which is sure to affect even the most successful people of the world and put an end to their intemperate indulgence in material luxuries All the big powers of the world cry for peace but the methods that they adopt to secure their end defeat their own purpose Instead of putting a check to their ever growing greed and lust and giving up their exclusive prerog tive of exploiting those who are weaker they are multiplying their destructive weapons for mutual security In the light of their spiritual ignorance they do not realise that by so doing they are generating an unseen force which some day is sure to rend that power into pieces How beautifully has he said somewhere Politicians calculate upon the number of mailed hands that are kept on the sword hilts they do not possess the third eye to see the great invisible hand that clasps in silence the hand of the helpless and waits its time The strong form their league by a combination of their powers driving the weak to form their own league alone with their God

V

THE HUMANE LABORATORY

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—*RABINDRANATH TAGORE*

I WAS in my early teens when she happened to see me She was a young German lady approach ng her extreme twenties She told my father that she belonged to the Christian Mission Her simple appear ance and pleasant nature had a great attraction for my father He attended to the talk she had with me and gave ear to the apologues she related to me deeply absorbed in thought He was touched by her true heartedness so much so that he could not help calling her Christ s True Apostle Her humbleness could not find words to acknowledge my father she conveyed to him her thanks with a light smile on her lips which were ready to kiss his child whom she had held close a moment before to her bosom I do not remember her name but I can recall even after thirteen years that gracious noble figure with the ame gentle smile on her lips and motherly look in her eyes I can also safely recall to my memory one of the interesting questions she put to me

What s the population of your country? she asked

About three hundred thirty million was my prompt

reply Turning to my elder brother who is about two years senior to me she said Can you count three hundred thirty million one by one ? Why not ? he replied instantaneously

Then how much time will you take ?

A few hours

A few hours ! repeated the German lady

Yes a few hours he replied with confidence

Then count my dear boy

One two three four five he began to count

He had hardly counted one hundred before he said Two minutes are over

Dividing 330 000 000 by 100 and multiplying by 2 she said Don t forget my dear boy it will take 6 600 000 minutes i e 12 years 203 days and 8 hours even to count the population of your country

It was quite an ordinary talk and at that moment the correct answer of the question carried no value for me more than the solution of a riddle But now when I am conscious of the qu lities of my head and heart I can look into its background which carried with it a very strong idea – a logical representation of the mightiest man power

According to the latest census report the popula tion of India has increased by seventy million making a total round number of 400 000 000 the biggest popul tion in the world next to China Of its people it can be sa d without fear of being accused of boasting that all in all they are not inferior in intelligence to any other race Indians are in no way inferior to the Japanese Tagore stresses upon the fact either in intellect or capacity The fundamental difference between the two lies in the fact that whereas India is not only overcome but is also overwhelmed by the British Japan has never allowed her interests to be clouded over by the benevolent protectorate of some European power There is no gainsaying the fact that Indians have a glorious civilisation and an ancient culture behind them There have been occasions when Indians fought for the British and thrust

themselves into the danger zones so bravely that even the enemies could not help praising their martial spirit There have also been occasions when Indians were put to work alongside of the people of other races on a footing of equality and they held their own very well

India is a country which has all types of men all kinds of climate and all sorts of land It is as such no exaggeration to say that in India we can grow or make almost all things we require for the use of our countrymen In comparison with all other countries on the globe Ind a has first place in sugar production second place in rice tobacco cotton and tea production and third place in wheat production

Nature has al o blessed the huge area of India with valuable minerals below the ground thick forests above it and with a large stock of cattle India is fortunate enough to have one third of the cattle of the world

But still India is a miserable country The bred and born of this country go about in torn and shabby rags and shiver in winter owing to lack of money with which they can buy clothes they need

I have seen with my very eyes not once but very often poor starving beggars with their hands put into the dustbins in search of eatables

I look around remarks Poet Tagore and see famished bodies crying for bread I have seen women in villages dig up mud for a few drops of drinking water for wells are even more scarce in Indian villages than schools

Just imagine the misery of millions of path makers who break stones all day long and bear the scorching heat of the sun on their naked bodies but fail to get a handful of grain in return to the sweat of their brow

India has the most fertile land but most of us do not have the chance to enjoy even one proper meal—proper in the true sense of the word—in the whole of their lives India has decidedly the best climate but most of us are too unfortunate to g t fresh air

India is rich in minerals but its people are poor in wealth India possesses huge area of two million square miles but its people live huddled together in dismal dark and smelly slums India has as much as one third of the animals of the world but our children do not get enough milk We are one fifth of the *population of the world but have absolutely no say* in the matters of shaping the destinies of the world

I hate poverty speaks Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru addressing the meeting of All India Congress Committee on 7th August last My grievence against the British is that they have made Indians miserable poverty stricken wrecks of humanity

I look around and see riots raging all over the country says Dr Tagore in the same spirit When crores of Indian lives are lost our property looted ou women dishonoured the mighty British arms stir in no action Only the British voice is raised from overseas to chide us for our unfitness to put our house in order

At another instance he regrets that from ancient times the people of our country have been accustomed to rely upon others Referring to his early experiences in village Shilaidah he says It was difficult to help them because they despised themselves They would say We are dogs—only whipping and beating will keep us right

Shilaidah is one of the seven hundred thousand villages of India Nine out of ten people of India live in villages But none out of the nine is educated They believe in out of date old convictions They are of the belief that God has made them poor and that it is just according to the will of God that they are in a wretched miserable plight disgraceful to humanity For centuries long they have been deprived of education and its true spirit They fail to find out means for their own welfare unless they are led by some outward power because the long periods of illiteracy have deprived them of the sense of responsibility for their own lives

India is a country of villages Whenever any

among us or a foreigner is to describe an Indian he will to make his description correct describe a typical villager with his body bare to the waist his feet bare the rather thin *pagri* on his head a short torn *dhoti* being all the clothing he wears and some implement—an insignia of his labour of cultivation—in his hand Out of every hundred among us there are about seventy two who depend upon cultivation or in other words two hundred and eighty eight million people of India are cultivators Whenever there arises any question of the interests of India such a vast majority of people cannot be ignored at any cost No democratic government will ever work successfully in free India unless and until the rights of our peasants are safe and secure No reform ever introduced will be in the interest of the country unless that is beneficial to the peasant millions No step towards freedom is ever possible unless this majority of our teeming millions is aroused of the right of freedom Our national leaders today are fully conscious of these facts For the last few years Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress have been doing their best for rural uplift according to their well planned programme and their endeavours have no doubt resulted into an enormous success The peasants are however still poor but they have begun to re lise that they are poor and what their poverty owes to They are still uneducated but they will not object if their coming generations welcome education

When Tagore began the work of rural reconstruction he did not think in terms of the whole country He could not take responsibility for the whole of India He rather wished to win only one or two small villages because in his opinion if he could free only one or two villages from the bonds of ignorance and weakness there would be built on a tiny scale an ideal for the whole of India

Tagore was a fellow citi en bred and born of the biggest city of India His forefathers were among the earliest settlers of Calcutta He had never had the opportunity of experiencing the pleasures and priva

tions of the country folk He had started his Santi niketan as early as 1901 In the midst of Santiniketan work when he was busy heart and soul with his activities he happened to be engaged in the manage ment of his ancestral property

In connection with this work he had to live at Shilaidah and Potisar That was the first time that he saw the life of the villages He was then a emin dar and his tenants used to bring before him their delights and their difficulties He was never tired of hearing their complaints and demands His door was open upon all at all hours People could come to see him at any time from daybreak till night They could talk to him as if he was one of them They never hesitated to put before him what they had in their mind to sav

It was a general practice with Tagore that he never displeased a visitor A friend says that he would be all ears when he was attending to a visitor whether the visitor might be an acquaintance or a stranger While seeing him busy in talk with a visitor one would certainly wonder as to how he could get time for so many other businesses Even in correspondence he had set the same example He never left any letter unanswered He never seemed to care whether the writer of the letter was a stranger or known to him He would reply to every letter in due course If it w s only a little chap quite unknown to him he would receive a reply If it was a mere tiny doll with heart and soul she would get an answer

Similar was his attitude when he was living at Shilaidah and Potisar Several times it so happened that he spent his whole day in receiving his village guests and did not notice even if the time for food had passed He would feel very happy in these busy hours because he knew that he was gaining something which would go a long way to give some day shape to his dreams

Since the day he was engaged in his *zamindari* work he had been a keen observer of all matters concerned with the rural uplift Naturally he had most of the

capacity to grasp and know He grasped what he saw He knew what he grasped He knew that his Santiniketan work would remain incomplete if he did not care for rural reconstruction People used to put before him their sorrows and sufferings wherefrom he could have practical knowledge of their real needs and demands He would think over the complaints and tried restlessly to satisfy th needs of the poor villagers

By and by the sorrow and poverty of the villagers became crystal clear to him He felt humiliated to spend his days among the poor in a princely fashion He could like most of the emindars keep his concern only with money making But such an outlook would certainly degrade his personality in his own eyes if not in the eyes of the world He hated this attitude He put forth his endeavours in thinking out as to how he could arouse the villagers minds so that they might themselves feel the responsibility for their ownselves

He was of the opinion that if help was rendered to the villagers from outside it would not be as bene ficial as to make them stand on their own feet Such a help would in no case make them self supporting He disapproved outside help for outside help could be withdrawn at any moment His definite aim was to stir them to life

It was a problem which required much thinking The people were not capable to absorb any help There was a vast current of inferiority complex preva lent in the mentality of the village people They condemned themselves to an undesirable extent

To start rural uplift work was quite a difficult task those days but with Tagore it was quite natural not to submit to difficulties He disliked to lead a dull life with no difficulties His temperament rose in rebellion against obstacles

Suddenly one day fire broke out in the neighbour ing village Villagers lost their heads but could not do anything Unfortunately there was no water in the village Perhaps the people had no sense of their

own interests They were forcibly driven out of their houses by Tagore s men The latter had to effect violence They had to do good with blows They broke up the roofs of the affected houses to bring the fire under control

The village people were not too intelligent to spoil their own small to save their own big If they were not supplied with outside support they would certainly have lost their part as well as their whole But outside help is neither sure nor respectable Tagore did not like them to look for help at others faces and to suffer the violence of the others to ensure safety His aim could be achieved only if he could educate them to have full confidence in themselves

There has been a custom in our India that rich persons spend a part of their wealth for the welfare of the general public of their town city or village by erecting for their use some wells *mandirs* or *sarais* or by providing them with other facilities they may require Hundreds of schools in India many in small villages or towns and the others in cities are also entirely supported by the rich individuals According to the same traditional custom the big emindars have been responsible for the protection of their villages They have to look after the health and education of the people Ac ording to Tagore th system is nothing but to weaken our self reliance

By the benevolence of the rich he said the village was kept in good condition But as soon as they began to leave the villages and live in the city the water d ied up cholera and malaria became rampant and in village after village the springs of happiness were choked

I have never been one to accept old traditions says the Poet He was of the opinion that the people must be self upporting they must not cry for help when they are in distress They may be poor but they must have the courage and spirit to live like civili ed people They should learn to dislike to be disgraced by the rich who care not a bit for the feelings of the poor if they are not in mood

night schools Above all he could infuse in his people the spirit of self reliance

Tagore would not call his activities a success if he had failed to make them realise that they suffered not because God wanted them to be so but because they had never tried to probe the potentialities that lay dormant within them That was really a happy time for him and for his people He had truly met them because he had come to them with his offerings and not with his wants

He worked earnestly for the revival of weavings and other arts and crafts of the country writes Ramananda Chatterjee an old friend of the Poet particularly village arts and crafts and contributed his full share to making education in India Indian as well as human and humane in the broadest sense and to the sanitation reconstruction reorganisation and rejuvenation of villages

Official reports have also praised him as a model landlord for his activities for village reconstruction in his estate

In spite of his firm will to serve the people in villages he did not have sufficient practical experience He noted the peasants coming to their fields with their own ploughs and bullocks and ploughing only their own small fields He suggested them that to work separately on their fields was sheer waste of strength They should mix up their capital and resources and buy one traction engine to get their ploughing done easily He also advised them that when the harvest would be ready they would store the whole in a place in the village where the merchant would come and buy all at a right price and that the sale proceeds would be distributed among them The villagers acknowledged the proposal in good spirit but they were afraid as to who would carry it out When they put their question before the Poet he felt sorry that he was too inexperienced to give a practical shape to his own proposal and realised that inexpert service was as much a dangerous thing as little knowledge

Thenceforth he sent his son and late Santosh

Kumar Mojumdar abroad to learn agriculture and animal husbandry As also he strove to learn himself accord ing to his immediate needs though later he could study farming pottery village economics production of hides manures looms tractors and so many other subjects concerned with the rural reconstruction

It was in 912 that the Poet was in a suburb of London named Ealing where a transaction was made with Major Sinha the brother of Lord Sinha whereby the old house of Sriniketan was purchased Very easily the whole matter between the two friends was settled *The price offered was immediately accepted* It seemed to come like a flash to the Poet that there on that very spot something great was going to happen and today after thirty years we see how right he was He thought of continuing the work there which he had begun in Shilaidah The house was in a dilapi dated condition and people said that that was haunted A considerable amount of money was required to get it repaired For a time nothing was done and it remained as it was

Deenabandhu Andrews advised him to dispose of this house How could he do so? His achievement had begun as a picture in his mind He had imagined it He had thought of a great thing that ought to be done He hoped that one or two purposes of his life would come to fruition there

Any great man would do well to remember that his promotion depends largely upon his power to foresee and plan His spirit to do adventures was roused by his imagination

Tagore was well experienced to make mind pictures Most of us say that to make imag nary p ctures is the pastime of an idle brain This may be their way of saying that idle people always make visionary projects and perform nothimg The truth is that imagination is the foreshadow of every great work

For an instance there was a poor boy of eleven in Swit erland He could work well with his pencil He drew the sketch of the bridge running over the river *in his village* Suddenly came the picture of a

bridge into his mind He first became an architect then an engineer then a bridge builder When he was over fifty he was afforded an opportunity of building one of the largest bridges in the world The dream that he had when a boy became the master purpose of his life

There are thousands of similar instances which can be added to the length of this article Let me say that Tagore had the most ama ingly creative imagi nation He did not know how this house would help him to achieve his aim but the mind picture of his aim was clearly visible to him He started the work at Surul To Surul he gave the name of Sriniketan and laid the foundation of the Rural Reconstruction In stitute of the Visvabharati

He sowed the seed in an unproductive field and expected that some day a shoot may suddenly spring up Elmhirst a friend of the Poet helped him a great deal in his endeavours It was he who developed this place into a eparate field of work Mrs and Mr L K Elmhirst have been for years helping to maintain the institute by an annual grant of more than Rs 40 000 That is the main if not the only appreciable source of its income

Our national leaders were yet thinking about rural uplift when Tagore started his experiments at Surul He had a love for the villages and the villagers He was helped in his mission by Elmhirst at whose hands the work met with great success The seed which in the beginning did not show any sign of giving fruit sprung up in a green plant mixed up with a sweet fragrance and things which seemed to be lacking resulted into a tremendous success followed by a delightful future

Every reformer is apt to bear insults at the hands of his opponents Even Mahomet and Christ the greatest reformers the world has ever produced were treated in accordance with the same unchangeable principle of this ever changing world There had been many an instance in the life of the Holy Prophet that he was abused by the non Moslems that filth was

thrown upon him that he was strangled by infidels with a piece of cloth in his neck

Tagore was rather fortunate that neither he was abused by his people nor ill treated in any other way of some serious nature He had to defy some of his own near and dear ones who opposed him he had to stand against the rich who were never inclined to accept any re orm and above all he had to hear bitter words of the illiterate people who were too much depraved to accept any new idea

There is an important event in the history of the Prophet and the Islam that Omar a leading man of the Quraish was bitterly opposed to Islam and the Prophet One day he thought it would be better to slay Mahomet and finish the whole affair at a single stroke Accordingly he took his sword and went in search of him On the way he met a relation of his who asked him where he was going To kill Mahomet replied Omar Why don t you look to your own family first ? said the man Your sister F tima and her husb nd have also become Moslems Hearing this Omar turned his steps towards his sister s house On seeing Omar they concealed the leaves of the Koran they were reading What were you reading ? enquired Omar I have heard you have joined Mahomet Saying this he fell upon his brother in law and beat him very severely His sister came forward to protect her husband but he beat her also At last she cried out Omar do wh t you w ll e ha e accepted Islam and will stick to it Her tone was very firm Omar turned to look at her Her face and clothes were covered with blood He felt very sorry His heart softened He begged her pardon and asked her to read to him also what she had been reading She read Whatev r is in the heavens and the earth declares the glory of God and He is mighty and wise She went on reading In a few moments Omar s heart was won and he declared himself a Moslem

In a simil r way the people of Tagore s estate who once disregarded his suggestions and frankly refused to act in accordance with his proposals felt

spiritual pleasure to devote themselves to his will They respected his counsel with all their heart and revered him as their spiritual father Once the Poet had to go out with an English magistrate of the district in which his estate was situated Those were the days when Government officials particularly English ones were held in great reverential fear A ryot was asked to arrange for the conveyance of the Poet and the magistrate The ryot brought only one palanquin When he was accused of the fault he explained that he *thought it only natural and proper that anybody who* chose to accompany Gurudev should walk Again *when he was asked he brought a gouty pony for the* magistrate

Like Deenabandhu Andrews Elmhirst has been a true friend of India and Indians Since the beginning of his relations with Gurudev he has been a devotee of his and his ideal Elmhirst s devotion was formed in the light of his knowledge and not in the darkness of his belief

The traveller has to knock at every alien door to come to his own Elmhirst had to wander through all the amplitude of the outer world to reach the inner most sanctuary of his purpose Courageously he passed over the dreadful difficulties he came across and fought tooth and nail all the obstacles He strained every nerve to ascend the summit of success and struggled to the best of his invincible will to bring out the accomplishment of his purpose out of his strenuous efforts

Tagore was assisted by such a genius as Elmhirst who was at the same time a sincere worker Tagore himself was a man who as he says never shirked responsibility *Their joint efforts were a source of* favourable accomplishment and a matter of pleasure to both of them

At the very outset of their work they had to infuse *in the villagers the spirit of self reliance It could be* accomplished by imparting education to them So *under the Village Welfare D partment night schools* for the boys and adults of the working classes were

started

In 1913 writes Deenabandhu when I first came to Santiniketan one of the teachers took me over the upland across the moor to Surul in order to visit the house where this new venture was to be made and where our agricultural work was likely to begin My heart sank within me as I noticed the dilapidated state into which everything had fallen Indeed the land all round the great central house had gone back into the jungle It was clearly a deadly breeding place for malarial mosquitoes

When the Poet himself came back from Europe I told him how I had marvelled at his act of faith and openly expressed to him my own misgivings but he simply brushed them aside and remained quite re olute about the future He seemed already to have foreseen in his wide vision what was going to happen

As we all fully expected malaria became from the start our most relentless foe Nearly every one who went over to live at Surul espec lly after the monsoon rains were over was stricken by a malignant fever We soon began to realise from our own painful experience why the whole building and court yard had thus fallen to ruin For the place was a hot bed of mosquitoes and no one could live there for long with safety

Yet we had one singular advantage in carrying on our anti malarial campa gn For Sant niketan itself standing on a rising ground was out of the danger one and comparatively free from malarial infection This was due to the fact that its soil differed entirely from that of Surul which was on the allu ial mud soil of the Ganges valley Possibly at one time Santinike tan had been a sand bank jut ing out into the sea for the sandy soil seems to go down more than a hundred feet and the heaviest monsoon rains always dry off in a few hours

So it was possible to conduct a great part of the anti malarial campaign in the earliest days of the experiment from Santiniketan though from the very first there were tho e also who had to live at Surul

the year round Little by little the thick undergrowth was cleared away the great tank was cleaned new houses were built and things were put in order

It was the marvellous achievement of the Poet and others who worked in Surul that they wiped out the disease of malaria from Surul and the neighbouring villages Malaria is really the gravest of all agricultural issues in a large area of India today With millions of deaths every year from malaria and tenfold that number of diseased human beings leading an enfeebled existence how can India be happy or prosperous? It has been reckoned that as many as one in every four of the Indian population is thus debilitated

The Poet laid great stress on his work at Surul being regarded as a laboratory where they had to try out experiments in rural reconstruction on an intensive scale They also had a medical co operative work and experienced the same amount of success as in the malarial research The whole village was united in a co operative plan admirably conducted which gave them a doctor of their own who might be called in at any time of serious illness and who looked after the health of the whole village

The co operative plan was also introduced with regard to the primary education and boy scout orga nisation Through the enthusiasm of the children themselves new life and energy was flowing back to revive the villages

Today after a lapse of thirty years we s e Sriniketan a very big institute and an *ideal for the motherland* The institute consists of the following departments working in a constructive way

I Village Welfare Department
  (a) *Agricultural improvement with the help of* the central farm at Sriniketan
  (b) Introduction of suitable home industries as subsidiary occupation *e g* making of palm *leaf fans and mats spinning of sunn* hemp and other fibres weaving dairy
  ( ) Adult education through the circulating library publication of bulletins in simple

Bengali magic lantern lectures and talks exhibitions

(*d*) Improvement of the village primary schools

(*e*) Establishment of *night chools for the boys* and adults of working classes

(*f*) Organisation of *Brati B lak* troops (village boy scouts)

(*g*) Recreational use of leisure time by organising seasonal festivals e g *Vriksha ropan* (tree planting) *Saradotsava* (autumn festival) *Na anna* (new harvest festival) *Jatra* and *Kati*

(*h*) Improvement of health by organising co operative health societies (wh re possible) by health education and propaganda and by organising sanitary measures by voluntary effort

(*i*) Organisation of co operative societies of different types through the Visvabharati Central Co operative Bank Limited

(*j*) Flood and famine relief work

II Department of Education

(*a*) *Siksha Sat a* (Poet s school for village boys)

(*b*) *Siksha Charcha Bhavana* (*gu u* training school under the Government scheme with slight modifications)

(*c*) Supervision of village schools boy scouts and village education generally

III Department of Health

(*a*) Central dispensary and clinical laboratory at Sriniketan

(*b*) Hospital w th a few beds

(*c*) Proposed Andrews Memorial Hospital

(*d*) Maternity and child welfare centre in charge of a lady health visitor *d i* training centre

(*e*) Co operative health society for the villages

IV Women s Welfare

(*a*) Sriniketan girls school with two lady teachers

(*b*) Three schools for adult women in the villages managed by l dy workers

V Farm

(a) Farm proper for experiment and demonstration
(b) Nursery
(c) Orchard
(d) Experiment in anti soil erosion
(e) Experiment in afforestation
(f) Dairy with Sind cattle
(g) Fodder farm
(h) Bee keeping
(i) Pisciculture

VI *Silpa Bhavana* (Department of Organised Village and Cottage Industries)

(a) Carpentry
(b) Weaving
(c) Carpet making
(d) Leather craft and shoe making
(e) Bookbinding
(f) Lacquer work
(g) Pottery
(h) Fruit preserves
(i) *Batik* (artistic dyeing of silk introduced from Java Bali)

VII Department of Socio Economic Survey Research

Several bulletins have been published and some are under preparation

VIII The Visvabharati Central Cooperative Bank Limited

VI

THE TWO ANGELS OF PEACE

T on f M h I d m th th
h d h d g y d t th y f th
orld R b d h T g d M h tm G dh
Th B t h m y h b gh lw y d
l g ph t h ve l d b h mp l f
b d w th I d w l d f b d m
g d h T kish B th Th I ff t
d h gh po q d bo f k d t lk d
f h ma g p t k J gd h B
P f ll R y d R m tt d f m th l m d
sph f bu T g th P d G dh
th My d l d f ru d t bo d d
pl d her l g w h th th g d f ld
cul d vil

—*ABDUR RAHMAN SIDDIQI*

TAGORE and Gandhi are the two counterparts of the New Life Movement in India The one thinks The other acts Thus they move forward the two whe ls of the golden chariot of idealism The poetry of Tagore has a spark of shrewd statesmanship The statesmanship of Gandhi has a music of sublime poetry Combining idealism and practicability none of them is a glorifier of the past If Tagore was a mystic his mysticism is deeply hued in the realities of a hard mechanical age If Gandhi is a Christ he is es entially a Christ of the twentieth century Each of them lives in the present as a soldier of eternity With eyes fixed in the distant hori on they do not trail behind looking backwards With a set face they ga e at the Pole Star of per manent peace and prosperity for the world They *alone can pilot the shipwrecked humanity*

Words can be things of power Our scriptures talk of a time when words had magic The

mant ams were just words but words with this magic Men perfected through discipline uttered thes *mantrams* It was the ancient Wisdom The *rishis* opened their mouths and spoke In the world of our ancient scriptures the elements obeyed The tempest ceased The seas calmed The very dead awoke From the *tapovanas* hid in the heart of forests words leapt forth words of flame words of light The words that come out of the burning heart of a mother do not the hardest quail before them? Indian philosophy recognises the force of *p ana* Whenever words come charged with *prana* they are things of power indeed

As the words pour forth rising and falling the listeners sometimes gasp for breath They are lulled into dumb fascination The speaker becomes the master of the moment the potent charmer His words be come symbols of power When a people are in des pa r great words spoken greatly can put new life into hearts that droop They mould into dynamic forces of action weaklings and cowards When the orator opens his mouth cho ses his words and wings them with the flame hearts are flung about Dead and drooping things leap into life But the oratorical word with its particular mould and the magic are rather passing things They are quickly put out When the voice becomes hushed they cease to burn In the moment of glow great movements of emotion might be started They pass like a summer storm

But there are words which find a different rhythm These constitute the poetic word The poetic word when it is truest is the Soul word

The poetic word seeks its own rhythm mould and music The poetic word has its moods and moments of vision in the human soul The poetic word is generally the vessel holding some aspect of reality glimpsed during fleeting moments It ike a colour ed crystal bowl that holds s liquid borrows the colour of t new beauty The bowl with have

had to endure the cold dignity of emptiness Thus poetry is a creation of enchantment Out of noth ng spring the currents of emotion that lash us to cease less activity in mind and matter

All poetry is written on the Mount of Transfigura tion There is revelation in it It is the mingling of Heaven and Earth The poet becomes in th moment of creation an instrument for the expression of the highest visions To arrive at truth the seeker must become profoundly imperson l None can be come absolutely detached but the poetic mood is perhaps the nearest example But to the poet the objective world acts merely as a stimulus and not as a bondage If the objective world assumes undue importance the fountain of the poetic world begins to dry up The poetic mood refuses to be drawn into the bondage of the objective world It has its supreme offering to the highest needs of the human spirit *Th s offering is the Soul word*

The Soul word energises into eternal life the visions of Re lity And the poet is he vho c n s ng Others too might see kindred visions but tl eir mood is not the mood of the poet They l t them go and are not vitally affected The poet s genius tends i a different manner altogether He weaves around the vision the exquisite web of his art He seeks to hold the vision in this web

Tagore unlike Mahatma Gandhi does not fill his head with politics Pol tics is a devil s game It is a dull amusement in the doing Mr Tagore like the Indian civilisation itself has been content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its sponta neity His poetry has a deep touch of innocence and simplicity Birds nd leaves are as near to Tagore as they ar to children And this quality again we find in Gandhi Gandhi is happy with children and children are happy with Gandhi

The utter misery of the poor their tragic lone liness touch the mind of the poet into life The poet loses himself in his contemplation He broods upon this tragedy His mind becomes a burn

thing And then slowly there dawns in his mind a vision The God of his passionate imagination is there among these despised ones clothed as one of them He is their friend their guide their comrade The heart of the poet rejoices God is great An irresistible impulse of adoration takes hold of him He must needs bow and touch God s feet This is the vision It is held in the exquisite web of the Soul word We who know the Soul word can thrill with the poet And throb to his vision

The world of objective reality cannot catch the poet so easily The poet just eludes its grip He flings in its face the poetic word But the *karmayogin* passes through fire and flood The path of his expression becomes the Soul deed

The Soul word and the Soul deed are fruits of the same spiritual mood The same spiritual experience strikes different notes on their minds The harmony of the Soul word produces the heroism of the Soul deed The difference is not that while the one acts the other lives in a state of poetic inaction Soul word of the poet seer is as much an action as the concrete labour Only the poet acts in a finer plane of human emotions Rabindranath stands for the Soul word Gandhi stands for the Soul deed Tagore is the Poet Laureate of Asia The great thinker has offered to awakening India some of the most concrete ideals He is the servant of humanity He claims his place in the ranks of the toilers of the earth Sriniketan endeavours to reconstruct the shattered life of the villager It is the creation of the very mind from which have flowed the melodies of the Gitanjali Mahatma Gandhi is great not merely in the field of action He has his place in the realm of thought and imagination He too has dreamt a great white dream of love compassion and beauty He has created ideals that stir us to the depths of our being These ideals call us out of our little narrow lives into the vast world of promise and adventure

When Tagore enters the world of Gandhi he sees

spinning wheels and carding bows The one humming and the other thrumming He watches the workers clothed in raiment looking like gunny bags He intellectually grasps the fact that all these are inspired by love and compassion He yet asks himself in bewild red anxiety whether this world with its round of labour can compare with his own radiant world of movement and music There God daily paints the skies with silver and gold The very leaves murmur love songs Gandhi has disciplined his senses He has brought his volcanic impulses under the control of a searching intellect and an iron will As he enters the world of Tagore he cannot help asking what possibly could be the meaning of this riot of colours ? Out in the wide world men are dying of hunger Darkness is creeping into the cottages of the poor and even into their souls

The mind of Gandhi does not give free scope for the aesthetic impulses He does not wander after the lotus feet of Beauty

In an article written in answer to the Poet s criticism of the *charkha* Gandhi wrote referring obviously to the Poet

The world easily finds a place of ho iour for the magician who produces new and dazzling things

The creations of ırt are not merely da ling or glittering Tl ere can be precious gold too in it In fact every great creation of art has a vital message to the human spirit These songs the fair blossoms of a poet s creation have a vital value These are as much a part of truth as acts of compı ion and service These song too are in a sense act of compassion Not that Candhi is unmoved by beauty But beauty is only a minister to his soul It nables him as a friend to go forward on his ceaseless search But to the poet Beauty becomes enthroned in Heaven Gandhi who has brought his own impulses under the control of a searching intellect and an iron will holds that art merely da les He once sa d to me The skeletons of Orissa haunt my dreams and waking hours What will

them is beautiful to my eyes Here we have the foundation of even his aesthetics

The ideal of ultimate perfection is a perfection in harmony Life is complex There are in it many conflicting elements To harmonise is highest and the most alluring of ideals None might ever have achieved Nor found this ultimate harmony Perhaps none ever will But it certainly is given unto us to make our lives a dedication to that ideal Christ has said Be ye perfect even as your Father in Heaven is perfect It is for us to project for our guiding star the very highest aspiration

The mode of movement is not the same Gandhi mo es along the straight narrow path of incessant endeavour Every endeavour leaves a transforming touch on his personality It is a slow and toilsome march In the case of Rabindranath the Poet seer the progre s is by rapid wayward movements His poetic soul breaks out into echoes of laughter He must feel along the bye paths He dare not pass by *anything He goes a certain way and then vanishes* In another mood of the soul he rises on wings of lightning He is one with the heart of Reality

If the philosophy of Gandhi is a popular philosophy the po try of Tagore is also a popular poetry As the generations pa s says Yeats travellers will hum them on the highway and men rowing upon rivers Lovers while they await one another shall find in murmuring them this love of God a magic gulf wherein their own more bitter passion may bathe and renew its youth

A great poet is possess d with a purpose beyond his own He is in the grip of a great idea He be lieves that he has come into the world with a mis sion He feels an urge It comes from a Higher Being This interior command stronger than words is felt by all men of genius This realisation gives them the power to fight for an idea with a gambler s recklessness *As an egotist man is hopel ssly weak* As a vehicle of mighty idea he is formidable The same thought is expres ed by Bernard Shaw in his

Man and Superman through the mouth of Don Juan Man who in his own selfish affairs is a coward to the backbone will fight for an idea like a hero When a man imagines that he is fighting for a great idea nothing can stop him He would struggle against great odds He would welcome the frown of his enemy He would look torture face to face He would remain unmoved when his dearest compan ons desert him He would mount the scaffold with per fect nonchalance

This heroic virtue of the soul we see in the case of Mahatma Gandhi Nothing can sh ke his faith He remains firm like a rock in his conviction amidst an encircling gloom Th agony of his soul he can not hide He feels lonely like a star But how ever lonely the path may be a pioneer l ke Gandhi must travel it alone His soul has been wedded to the ideal of non violence and how can he forsake it? A message from the he vens whispers to him He ke ps aloft the flag of his faith and marches on fearlessly toward the goal And he writes For me non violence is a creed I must act up to it whether I am alone or have companions Since propagation of non violence is th mission of my life I must pursue it in all weathers Had Gandhi been an egotist his strength would surely have failed him The almost inevitable tragedy was avert ed He believed that he w s an instrument in the hand of a Supreme Being This faith sustained him when the ho i on was the darkest He gives expres sion to his belief in many of his writings Thus he writes in *Harijan* of 28th July 1940 I believe that my footsteps are guided by God and all my life is based on this belief

The poetry of Tagore like the Inner Voice of Gandhi has a divine origin Thus Tagore addre es God in Gitanjali

When thou commande t m to sing it seems that my heart would bre k u th pride and I look to th face and tea s come to my eyes

Thus Tagore has never considered him elf

author of his verse as Gandhi has never regarded him self as the author of his actions

This faith in the existence of a God has been the main source of his strength Again and again we come across lines in Gandhiji s writings which show unmistakably that he believes in an Oversoul It animates all his actions and has shaped all the mo mentous decisions of his life

This kind of faith in some mysterious Being characterises Rabindranath s writings too He calls this Being *Jivan Devata* the Lord of his life His life was a flute in the hand of a divine musi cian The Lord of his life was continually shaping his being as a potter s wheel shapes the pitcher What he felt at that supreme moment has been recorded in one of his Hibbert Lectures There we come across the following lines I felt sure that some B ing who comprehended me and my world was seeking his best expression in all my experiences uniting them into an ever widening in dividuality which is a spiritual work of art Here we discover the reason why genius has been called reli gious by Emerson A great poet sings what he is ordered to sing by the indwelling Deity His pen records joyfully what is dictated to him by a spirit higher than his own In Rabindranath s poems we find again and again the joyous recognition of a Being that is continually seeking expression through the songs of the Poet This is the reason why we find both in the Poet and the Mahatma the same craving to reduce themselves to ero so that they might be perfect instruments in the hand of God

In the lowest state of life the world is made of *electrons* In the highest stage of life the whole *world is made of feelings* Thus it is well known among the critics of art that poetry is a painting in words while painting is *poetry in colours* Thus action and thought become one and the same on high level If Rabindranath Tagore acts through speeches Gandhi speaks through actions Both are the facets of one Divine Diamond They dip their pens in

divinity The Hidden Voice speaks through every fibre of their frame And it is the Voice which like electrons will one day mould itself into the Brave New World—The Kingdom Come!

VII

INDIA S AMBASSADOR IN RUSSIA

Wh l th mpe l t po fic th w lf f th ubj t t h ow l g d th U S S R l f d g tt mpt h g m d to h rm he t t f th ou t l tte h te d t t l w p pl d t b h o l h h d y m d c g be g ou g d a d d d t l th m l f ly f h be fi f l sa w Eno mo m a be g pe h t xp d the p o Wh l s l he m t h d d na l t wh h ly f w g w t ly d ff t t g of dev l p —m h g d pe f l p d m ty d h I look b t my ow y d y h ghly l d d tel l p pl d ft g h dis d f b b m I t h lp t g h t o tem f g m t b d ope l h th pl tatw wh h ha mad uch ry d po bl

—*RABINDRA VATH TAGORE*

RUSSIA has wrought a miracle said Dr Tagore in an interview given by him in America in 1930 after his visit to Russia I went to Moscow he continued and found that the sort of instruction that the Russian peasants and workers receive does not make them merely factory hands but develops them culturally

Under the C ar the Russian masses were as ignorant and stupid as the masses of India are today In India only seven per cent of the people are even nominally literate not educated just literate Russia was no better ten years ago

But now I was vastly impressed by the spread of literacy and elements of true culture the love for beauty among the humblest Russians

Formerly racial and religious conflicts were common in Russia as they are in India up to this day Now in Russia all these conflicts have disappeared Jews Armenians Christians and Moslems have learned to co operate

Of course the Russian authorities use their educational institutions as a means to propagate their own economic and political doctrines But with those views I have no concern I shall not p ss judgment upon economic teachings of anybody since that is not my field

It is the Russian method of enlightening the people that interests me

Russians are not believers in old theologies Service of mankind might be their religion

One of the interviewers suggested that the mass education in Russ a might be conducted for the purpose of propaganda and to influence their o n people towards a certain system of government

Of course they have their own propag nda replied the Po t but that is quite nat ral What must be realised is that there is a general interest in education My object was to see the interest us d in their work

Their education is not entirely materialistic They are not merely mak ng peasants into factory workers Creative art is thriving in Russia The theatres are crowded with people who ten years ago had no opportunity to ent r them For the first time the lower classes have been able to take advantage of what the the tres and operas offer them

Let us think of the Bolshevik Revolution in terms of a drama The first act was represented by the period from the est blishment of the Soviet Govern ment in November 1917 until the declaration of the New Economic Policy or Nep in March 1971 a declaration which closely coincided with the end of foreign intervention and civil w r The second act was characterised by the gradual reconstruction of the country under the compromise between socialism and capitalism which was created by the Nep The third

act of the revolution beginning in 1928 represented a determined effort on the part of the ruling Commun ist Party to cut the Gordian knot of social and economic contradictions inherent in the Nep by tearing out the last roots of capitalism in Russia

When Tagore visited Russia it was the period representing the third act This act mainly consisted of the anti religious demonstrations The psychology of making a clean break with the Russian past was a very important characteristic of the Soviet regime Such method were adopted as had previously been considered inadvisable e g huge parades holding up to mockery the objects of reverence of various faiths public burning of icons and so forth To these measures there have been added the melting down of church bells and the turning of copper and bronze to industrial uses the inauguration of systematic anti r ligious teaching in the schools the extended and intensified u e of the theatre the motion picture and the museum as media for anti religious propaganda

Though we have no concern to deal with religion yet we cannot help saying that the religion of the C ar Russia was the religion of wide spread injustice resulting in demolishing the liberty of the country It was a religion—certainly it was—but with mere idea and no expression The people of the C ar Russia were mostly Christians the Bible was their holy book what a fun it was! The teachings of Christ were honoured by them more in breach than in observance

Russia today is free of the religious bondages We need not discuss here whether Russia should have one religion or no but we must not avoid saying that in spite of the Bolshevik Russia s having no belief in religion she has been appreciated for her cosmopoli tan activities as also for her efforts for imparting peace and happiness to God s world by so many godly men like Tagore and others She has worked wonders in removing all the ancient sources of weakness and misery which formerly had lamed the red race and haunted it either with definite terrors or vague and scarcely conscious despond and in bringing about a

pervading buoyancy and optimism impossible to the people if they had been again in the religious days of the C ar Russia

Religion is the opium of the people said Karl Marx Marx also s id Destroy the social world of which religion is the spiritual aroma and you destroy religion Religion is the flowers that cover the chains Destroy the flowers and the chains will be seen Communism is convinced of the truth of Marx s words There have been two ideas in them One is that if the present politico economical system is destroyed religion will also decay The other is that if religion is directly attacked it will expose the chains hidden by religion and thereby the creation of the new system will be hastened Russian Communism has been earnestly carrying both lines of att ck and this has been the si nificance of the Russian struggle

Religion has often times allied itself with the powers that be especially in the West and especially so in Russia where the C ar was the head of both the State and the Church Unlike India the tendency of the Czar Russia was to allow no possible liberalism in religion Bolshevil Russia stood against such religion She wanted to ensure equal opportunities and rights for all in the body politic And she had In today Russia all have equally the blessings of life Accord ing to some it is only an outer spect The life they say find satisfaction only in realis ng itself as Eternal Being In detail we may disagree with the Communists we sincerely want that all should have as far as possible equal rights and privileges in lif

Since the time the Bolsheviki sei ed control of the Russian State they have never tired of putting through the most revolutionary changes in order to socialise the country and make it a fit place for the helpless masses to live in Being strongly convinced that capitalistic countries would sooner or later meet with economic disaster because of the revolt of labour and the conflicting economic interests of nations the Bolsheviki declared that Russia must be socialised in order to survive the approaching fall of capitalism.

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to make the peasants conscious of their position of their inherent rights which they did not enjoy of all the possibilities that lay open to them They were not ashamed to be propagandists and their propaganda was educative it was scientific it was human it was moral and carried all the fervour of social service that they were capable of igniting in their minds and heart Whatever they attempted to organise had always the welfare of the people as its direct inspiration They did not want to enjoy any exclusive privilege at all because that kind of enjoyment was anti social and therefore non human perhaps even inhuman All the store houses of wisdom of joy of well ordered social benefits were open to every one of them because every one of them had equal human right to them

The Poet had his Santiniketan in India which was linked up with the surrounding villages He also had his Sriniketan (the Rural Reconstruction Institute) situated at villa e Surul The inmates of Santiniketan and Sriniketan were trying their best to serve their neighbours to invite them to their festi als to supply them with medicine to demonstrate to them the efficiency of the up-to date methods of agriculture The educational work of Russia was therefore of great use to the Poet He wished he had more time and energy to study their work properly However he tried his best to ut lise his visit to Russia

In the evening of 12th September a concert was arranged in the Poet s honour under the joint auspices of the Society for Cutural Relations and the Moscow Association of Writers About sixty persons repre senting the Soviet public life art and science responded to the invitation

Professor Petroff in his opening speech of welcome said We who have taken part in the October Revolution and assisted at the construction of new forms of human culture extend a warm welcome to one who has come amongst us as a profound thinker to study our culture to study our strivings for the re newal of human society and thus of human personality itself

Rabindranath Tagore is an active worker on the front of popular education as well as a poet and a thinker He is endeavouring in the pedagogical institution founded by himself in Santiniketan to solve problems regarding the formation of human personality This branch of work occupies an important place in his activities and makes great demands upon his energy and strength Now he wishes to learn of the endeavours of our country to understand how in new and revolutionary conditions the human personality destined to advance human progress in economic in *social and in cultural conditions which are all new* expands and formulates Rabindranath Tagore wishes to understand how the human personality can in the conditions of socialist reconstruction perfect itself and become a veritable creator in the spheres of art science and in human progress of every description We welcome the visits of friends who come with an open heart and a pure soul to our country to study our structure to try and understand the aspirations of the masses towards a new human life a new and free system for the perfection of human nature

The people of Russia already knew Tagore They had read Tagore and they loved Tagore with all their heart They had at that time over twenty five editions of the Poet s books and a vast majority of the numerous nationalities of the U S S R were enjoying the constructive reading from those books They were therefore very happy and proud to show to the Poet whatever he wanted to see of their work and they felt sure that he would appreciate their educational activities The Poet had gone to Russia to learn *something* which would he thought go a long way to solve the great problems of his own country as also the *world problem of civilisation* Civilisation had as it has today taken man far away from his normal humanity *It had given birth to an extraordinary* artificial life It had created disease evoked specific sufferings created many anomalies

The Poet was profoundly interested in problems of education His idea his dream had been to create

free human beings who should be surrounded by an environment of creative work In Russia the Socialist Government had put an end to the evil of human existence in a kind of cage cut off from the rest of society The Poet was convinced that Russia s ideas were very much like his own dream his dream for a full life for the individual for complete education

The Poet s idea of education was that it should be in contact with life itself it should be a part of life By living a true life one can have proper education and not through the detachment from it which is so often seen in the colleges and schools in the civilised world which the Poet would call the brick built prisons in which children are denied the true goods of life

The entire country is scattered with the peasants houses A great deal of cultural social and educational work is carried on in these places These houses also serve the purpose of re reation clubs From time to time lectures are arranged to inform the masses on social and agricultural problems to initiate them into the scientific methods of tilling the land and reaping the maximum crops Every such house is equipped with a museum of natural history the rise and development of religion social and educational welfare They are also used as information bureaux for dealing with different subjects like agriculture taxation education Peasants coming from the surrounding vill ges with the intention of eliciting information about their own particular problems connected with the village life are allowed to stay in these houses for a few days at a nominal charge Thes houses are the chief vehicle of disseminating the necessary education among the one time illiterate peasantry and turning them into the useful and responsible citi ens of Russia

Tagore vis ted one such house at Moscow on 16th September He was introduced to the peasants present there by the superintendent of the house with the remarks that the Poet ha l come to study t life at first hand and to learn about their vay of

their hopes and aspirations and he concluded his remarks with the wish that that meeting might establish a deeper contact between the peasants of the Soviet Russia and those of India

In his reply to their address of welcome the Poet said *that he was very much impressed by the kind of* constructive work that was being carried on in Russia *to uplift the masses from the slough of poverty ignorance* disease and illiteracy He admired the heroic zeal of the Soviet masses who were co operating with the Government of their country in the uplift work

In the course of a talk which he had with the peasants some one among them asked the Poet to account for the perpetual communal tension in India Tagore s quick and pointed reply was that it was all due to the ignorance and illiteracy If these were liquidated all strife and hostilities would come to an end However the Poet was not very hopeful about the possibilities of a mass scale education in his country

When another peasant asked him to express his opinion about collectivisation that was being carried on in Russia Tagore said that he could not answer the question because he did not understand the working system of this scheme and desired that he would like to be informed from the peasants themselves about collectivisation and its bearing on the peasantry He was told that the basic idea of collectivisation was the social voluntary participation in the organisation of these collective farms About two hundred individuals farms were merged into a common unit Where about three thousand workers were putting their efforts for the common good the land was cultivated by their concerted efforts and advanced methods of agriculture such as scientific manuring and the use of tractors and other modern machinery had been introduced There was an eight hour working day and each fifth day was the holiday Those peasants who worked longer received overtime allowance When winter came the work on the land was not sufficient to engage all the members of

a collective unit About two thirds of them were permitted to leave the farm and seek employment in the big cities During their period of stay in the town they received one third of their summer wages from the farm and their families were permitted to reside in the rooms which were allotted to them in the farms

About fifty per cent of the Russian peasants had become the members of the collective farm before the Poet had visited Soviet Russia and the scheme was gaining popularity day by day The Poet was informed that the collective method of land exploitation was yielding a far better and hi her ratio of crops than the old individual system The reason is not far to seek The individuals cannot afford the modern scientific appliances nor could they utilise them in their small strips of land which each individual peasant owned Collective farms were the source of a new order of social existence New living houses had been built for each collective unit There vas a common dining hall and a school was attached with every unit The peasants were glad at this change of their former small dirty huts to their large sanitary hygienic collectivist houses

Under the collectivist social sy tem the condition of the women was much ameliorated They are not ignorant and helpless as is the case in India They have received the light of the new age in order to find their place in the world of humanity The women social workers of Russia have organised themselves into small collectivist brigades and travel in different parts of the country to rouse their sisters from their lethargy and to enlighten them about the economical and cultural benefits of collectivisation The women collectivists worked in the land side by side their men comra les There were in every collective farm a kindergarten a nursery and a common kitchen The women under the collective social system were really building up a new life in their country in which they were participating They were no longer in the clutches of superstition

ignorance They had become responsible citizens with a keen sense of duty

Tagore had taken some of his paintings with him which were displayed in the peasants meeting The verdict of the best critics present there was that he was the first class artist as every picture was making a very strong impression and was thrilling the audience He was told that his work was expressing the spirit of youth and this constituted the element of interest

The exhibition of the pictures of the Poet was opened at the State Museum of Moscow on 17th September It was largely attended by the public as well as the representatives of the various art and educational institutions of the country The hall was packed to its fullest capacity on the first day of exhibition P ofessor Petroff performed the opening ceremony and extended a cordial welcome on behalf of the Soviet Republic He introduced Tagore to the audience with the words that he was not only a great poet and a philosopher but also a great painter of his age He appreciated his vision and understanding of life s deeper realities In conclusion he hoped that his visit to the Soviet Union would prove a new link in the chain of uniting the toiling masses of the two countries The Poet returned warm thanks for the welcome extended to him on behalf of the State and the public and said that his pictures were the most intimate gifts that he could offer them for a true mutual understanding He had brought his pictures to them because he hoped that through his pictures he could come into direct touch with their mind while with his words he could not owing to the linguistic barrier He said that his pictures would speak to them without the medium of interpreter which was always unsatisfactory His paintings won warm approval from the art critics present there They considered those works to be a great manifestation of the aristic life

During the remaining days of the exhibition the museum was daily visited by more than five hundred

people

In the afternoon of 21th September the Poet visited an industrial labour commune for children and incorrigible children There were about one hundred children who lived in the colony Another hundred (non residents) dined there during the day The ages of those children ranged from fourteen to eighteen years The idea of this labour commune was to impart industrial training to those one time homeless waifs who had a definite tradition imbued in them of their former street life and also to mould them into honest conscientious ocial workers This commune had a self government All the affairs were managed by the youngsters themselves The period of retention did not exceed three years Each such labour commune was equipped with a school and a workshop The children did four hour practical work in the workshop and devoted three hours to the theoretical study in the class room They had their evenings entirely spare to be devoted to the social work or mental recreation For the sake of convenience they were divided into small groups If any of the cl ildren wanted to leave the colony to visit the town he did not require any special permit All that he had to do was to inform about it to his squad leader Institution of this kind have proved very useful in winning the children back from the street

The Poet had also the occasion to visit the cer tral State museums for the study of the people of the U S S R These two museums are located in a big mansion which previously belonged to Catherine the Great and present the scientific and illustrated de scri tion of the ethnographic l and economical region of the Soviet Union In this connection it may be observed that tl ere are more than one hundred and twenty nations inhabiting the jurisdiction of the Sovie Union wh ch covered an area of one s xth of the world

The last big function held in connection with the Poet s visit to the Soviet Russia was a big Literature and Concert Evening which was attended by more than two thousand persons A number of

Soviet writers poets and actors were present at the function The famous Russian poet Shingalee recited his ode to Rabindranath Tagore Several of the pieces of Tagore s poems were read out by the author Galperin A well known actor recited two poems in prose of Tagore s works The Poet himself read several of his poems which aroused tremendous applause from the public An opera party gave a demonstration of Russian village dances in the satire A peasant choir gave a recital of the Russian folk song When the function came to a close the Poet was given a tremendous applause as a parting act of appreciation for the Poet s versatile genius

VIII

THE GOLDEN PATH

F my l f h I ght th w th my g It w they wh led me f m doo t door d w th tl m ha I f lt b t m h g d t ich m orld

It w my g th t t ght m ll the l ns I h l rnt th y h w d m t p h h y b gh bef my ght m y t th h n f my h t

Th y g d d m ll th d y lo g th my terie of h cou t y f pl si d d t l t t wh t p l g h th y b ght m h g t th d f my j y

—*RABINDRANATH TAGORE*

THE record of the past interpreted in practical life by noble men and women supply the moral tonic which must be administered to each generation lest it should perish of ethical inanition and debility History sounds the paean of triumph of great movements in religion politics art and science The self sacrifice of the earnest lovers of humanity was the price always paid for the victory It seems to be a mysterious law that no progress can be made without sacrifice Some men and women must be prepared to d e as martyrs or face death as heroes to risk their lives as daring pioneers or bold heretics to practis abnormal absti nence to drill and discipline the body like the merciless martinets to scorn rank and honour to suffer hunger and thirst cold and fatigue to despise contumely and clumny to renounce money and marriage to forgo fame and fortune and family life to endure torture and imprisonment exile and loneli

ness—thus to master Sense and conquer Self and thereby to raise the mass of mankind to ever higher levels of Wisdom and Virtue History preserves the names and words and deeds of the most remarkable representatives of this small elite of martyrs apostles and amethysts whose life as G B Shaw puts it belong to the whole community and as long as they live it is their privilege to do for whatever they can They want to be thoroughly used up when they die for the harder they work the more they live *Life* is no brief candle for them It is a sort of splendid torch which they have got hold of for the moment and they want to burn it as brightly as possible before handing on to future *generations*

Nothing is more natural to man than to admire what is good and great He is not satisfied with bread and butter but hankers after something which will give him abiding solace and comfort His physical nature is satisfied with material things—food clothing hou es and riches but his spiritual nature craves food for his mind and soul He feels that man does not live by bread alone but by every word of God This is why even the man rolling in the lap of luxury feels that all is not right with him and seeks for better food This desire to bring nourishment to his soul leads men to approach and know great men It has been said that the search of the great is the dream of youth and the most serious occupation of mankind No nobler feeling than this of admiration for one higher than oneself dwells in the breast of man

Whence comes this feeling—this admiration of the Great? It owes its origin to a strong innate human desire to claim kinship between man and man More often than not do we feel that there is a common bond between the man on the pedestal and man in the street We humans each of us have common frailties common morality common hopes and common fears This feeling of kinship gives rise to the curiosity that goads us on to the personal qualities and idiosyncrasies of the great men and women

As if touched by a magic wand the man of genius

shines forth aloof from others around him but we wish to assure ourselves that he is one of us unlike u in some respects but very like us in others

Death and annihilation bury all the pageant cf humanity into oblivion Most of us come into this world live our span of existence and go from the stage of life quite unknown unwept and unsung Not a trace of us is left in this work a day world—nothing to identify us from the heap of cold ashes and the hand ful of dust Dust thou art and to the dust returnst exhorts the Holy Writ

Rarely enough from this vast mass of surging man kind is someone born to leave a trail of glory behind him a footprint on the sands of time Sometimes it is by virtue of a living thought that he wins the estima tion of his fellow brothers at other times he rises to eminence because of his eternal message of hope illustrated with the bitter struggles and the grim determination with which he faced the difficulties the patience with which he ultimately triumphed As we go through these accounts languor and ap thy vanish a new enthusiasm comes over us and a desire to fight well the battle of l fe comes back Sometimes a man of genius towers above his f llows because of creation of beauty that n ver perishes that with tands the on slaughts of time and lifts the soul of the percipient in stantaneously and irresistibly out of the reg on of self consciousness There is a lot of difference between the man who le ds a nameless life and goes the way of all flesh and the towering personality marked by some uncommon attr bute of mind The spoken thou hts of these great souls awaken the slumbering thoughts of others What they say all m n of that age were longing to say but w re finding no language to express and all of a sudden the thoughts of these men start up as from an enchanted sleep The voice of the universe speaks through them With their advent new thoughts new m anings n w forces float in the air The e great souls are the beacon l ghts in the voyage of life they come to inspire to guide and comfort us and take us to our destination By appreciating their lives

make our own lives sublime They are at once our friend philosopher and guide They serve as pillars of light to guide us to the promised land We in gratitude and joy say to them

> *At your voice*
> Panic despair flee away
> Ye move through the ranks recall
> The stragglers refresh the outworn
> Praise reinspire the brave
> Order courage return
> Eyes rekindling and prayers
> Follow your steps as you go
> Ye fill up the gaps in our files
> Strengthen the wavering line
> Stablish continue our march
> On to the bound of the waste
> On to the city of God

It is because we recognise the serviceable relation of such rare souls to their age that we have an abiding passion to probe into minutest details of their lives

When in an age or in a country there is the tendency of men being lumped into a lifeless mass it is the presence and worship of great men that stir it and break it up They give a rude shaking and disintegration begins With disintegration comes new energy and with it new life

Such men have handed down the essence of their inspired moments to posterity and posterity shall ever build their noble ideals of life on those immortal gospels of truth The heritage left by the great is to the young mind what the warming sun and the refreshing rain of spring are to the seeds which have lain dormant in the frosts of winter It is more for it may save from that which is worse than death as well as bless us with that what is better than life The teeming *millions of Indians look up Rama as an incarnation of God and repeat his name in weal and woe as* open sesame for deliverance from the bondage of birth and death Yet how few of them have ever realised what a great debt of *gratitude they owe to the saint* who composed Ramayana—the Bible of the Hindus

There are some heretics as there are always are who look upon all the principal characters of Ramayana as the mere figment of imagination They little feel that the whole nation regard R ma as real as the conception of a deity is in many other lands In this great panorama of time history is a thing of yesterday and most of the memorable things took place long before the art of writing came in vogue The Ramayana is not of an age but for all times it is not merely a book to be read at leisurely hours and put back on the shelf but for aeons it has been the fountain head of Moral In piration to one of the time honoured races of the world The living influence of this sublime epic tinged the warp and woof of an entire nation Perhaps no other book has such power to lift the wretched out of his misery the poor out of his poverty to make the burden bearer forget his burden the down trodden his degeneration The characters of Rama and Sita have been the rarest literary achievement Rama whose divinity has never been quest oned is intensely human in his trials and tribulations Sita who faced a storm of an outrageous fortune has set up an ideal for all women Every year the Hindu India commemorates these beloved heroes by staging the passion play of Ramavana and try to imb be the lofty idealism and teachings of the epic And yet how much do we know about the ba d Valmiki the creator of these immortal characters? Besides what has been mentioned in the Ramayana itself we do not know anything *about this king among the poets of all ages Kalidasa* the peerless poet of beauty suffers from the same fate—oblivion But as says the Poet Beauty lives though lilies die the man may pass away without being accorded *the honour worthy of him but his* achievement if it bears the hall mark of immortality will li e for aye

And hence this human and normal interest in the latest Indian *Poet* whos fame pervades far and away in the entire world No modern poet has been acco ded o much honour and recognition as this Shelley Bengal as he was one time called His works

place on shelves of all cultured people and have been translated into almost all the spoken languages of the world He has visited all the important cities of the world and has personally communicated his message in his own subtle way His niche among the galaxy of the classical poets is already assured And already so much has been said and written about the dignity and magnetic qualities of his personality Apart from the unique quality of his genius his personality makes a lasting impression on his fellow men Like Socrates a great man of genius may be physically unattractive but Mother Nature has been bountiful in the case of this Bengali Poet inside and out The personality of the man is as conspicuous as genius of the poet is great As he appeared when the sunset of life was coming on apace with the fine lineaments of his face and his silver locks flowing beard and flashing eyes he resembled an ancient seer stepping out of a sylvan glade in ancient Aryavarta or a patriarch full of wisdom moving in the sight of God Coleridge might have anticipated him when he uttered

> Beware! beware!
> Of his flashing eyes and floating hair
> And weave a circle round him thrice
> For he of honey dew hath fed
> And drunk the milk of Paradise

He was lionised even when he was just a youth of twenty with a tall stately figure and long curly hair In the rich variety of lyrical measures the original tunes that he constantly struck up predicted a great future for him Babu Akshay Chandar Sirkar a B ngali writer of no mean repute hailed him as the precursor of a new epos in the Bengali poetry but in view of the ever rising tide of his fame he warned him not to be intoxicated and carried away by the plaudits of the public One may wonder what that eminent writer would have thought if he had been living today and had been an eye witness to the world wide homage that has been paid to this Plato of all ages As a matter of fact an answer to this writer was anticipated in one of the early songs of the Poet

Have I come into this world as a beggar for fame to win handclaps by stringing words together? Who will awake today who will work who wants to wipe out the shame of the mother

Babu Bankim Chandar Chatterjee the celebrated Bengali novelist and the author of Bande Mataram the Indian National Anthem once suggested to Tagore that he should write an epic poem to establish a niche in the temple of fame in the domain of poetry The reply came much later in the form of a beautiful address dedicated to the Lyrical Muse as his beloved

I had a mind to enter the list for the composition of an epic poem but I do not know when my fancy struck your jingling bangles and broke into a thousand songs Owing to that unexpected accident the epic poem shattered into atoms is lying at your feet

In his *Reminiscences* Rabindranath mentions with characteristic modesty that he was at one time called the Shelley of Bengal Some of his English admirers have compared him with Byron We believe him to be greater than both—in insight in wisdom in *calm* vision of the Beautiful If highest poetry is to be the emotion recollected in tranquillity as Wordsworth says then we may claim Tagore to be the greatest poet of all ages

Tagore was nourished on the wisdom of the East His poetic muse thrived on the inspiration that came to him from Upanishads and from Bengali Vaishnava poets This wisdom of the East he interpreted in his lectures in Europe on The Meeting of East and West and My Ideal of Education The two notes of Ancient Wisdom are Human Solidarity and Supremacy of Spiritual Values These Tagore emphasises when exposing the weaknesses of Western civilisation Speaking to the English people he says When you come in contact with alien peoples with other races your want of love of humanity becomes apparent Again— Think of the ruthlessness and the commercialism present in the modern politics of Europe and America Europe has trampled upon the of the Eternal and the truth of Human Fellowship

[illegible] have been enriched by his [illegible] he has shed fresh lustre upon [illegible] s of human thought s

His [illegible] of Life [illegible] eems to us to be deeper than that of [illegible] modern poets [illegible] is an [illegible] Life according to him is [illegible] [illegible] is he who [illegible] ings again and again of city life [illegible] its throes of struggle its [illegible] rushing restless [illegible] Take [illegible] life with him is individu[illegible] [illegible] the idea of freedom in his social [illegible] ex[illegible] lains as little as [illegible] L[illegible] s hidden depths are not there [illegible] pea e—sharers and fellow [illegible] [illegible] do as we like That [illegible] Tak[illegible] another poet [illegible] social anarchy [illegible] tells with great [illegible] members of [illegible] think they [illegible] But surel[illegible] [illegible] the moral la[illegible] [illegible] reveren e for the moral la[illegible] His little story [illegible] poet—Hau[illegible] tman [illegible] ho lea[illegible] e [illegible] is that of an [illegible] with a beautiful n[illegible] mph [illegible] But is that the [illegible] Hauptmann [illegible] beautiful is mean[illegible] Communion with th[illegible] for fellowship [illegible] ith [illegible] poor and lowly and those who are [illegible] suffering and sin The Belgian drama[illegible] [illegible] tance who Tagore resemble[illegible] The Blue B[illegible] rd is the happine[illegible] s [illegible] Where [illegible] But when we a[illegible] k the question [illegible] Maeterlinck gives us no defi[illegible] [illegible] meaning must be [illegible] omething [illegible] S[illegible] rely [illegible] s meaning must be [illegible] it is not we alone who are [illegible] Th[illegible] truth is it is not we alone who are in [illegible] the Ideal the ideal too is in [illegible] comes to us again and again [illegible] our [illegible] enses a[illegible] d minds and hearts [illegible] He comes comes ever comes says [illegible] God but God also seeks Man [illegible] was impos[illegible] ible with His quest His [illegible]

grimage of Man He comes *into the* very storm of life but with silent steps And they that sit in the silence hear the voice that speaks beyond the walls of this world Througl the forest path He comes says the Poet In the forest is silence in the forest is the call to communion with Nature to a life of *sadhana* self discipline *tapasya* self purification In the forest the *tapovana* is the *shantiniketan*—the abode of peace Modern civilisation is in agony for it has lost touch with Nature and will not be healed of its wounds till it sings life again to Nature A e you in quest of Happiness? Then note that to run after silver and gold and the honours of the world is to run *away* from Him and who can be happy in running away from Him His coming is the law which binds and builds the world Yet we run away from Him again and again we run away from life to take refuge in conventions and unrealities We run away afraid to touch the Infinite in us afraid to take up the challenge of life anxious only to have agreeable emotions anxious to make fools of ourselves

From the poi t of view of *technique* Tagore is only an English poet by the courtesy of the freest possible interpretation of the term free verse He does not write in li es he writes in areas and he indulges in repeated refrains that are not in line with the practice of free verse Moreover Tagore does not *write* h s poetry he sings his poetry music and poetry re born together in India In this land music has always been regarded as the greatest of the arts and this for several reasons Other arts are at their best when they show a *musical* quality Coleridge remarks very pertinently that wherever you find a sentence musically worded or true rhythm and melody in the word there is something deep and good in the words too For body and soul word and idea go strangely together here as everywhere It is only when the heart of him is rapt into the true passion of melody and the very tones of him become musical by the greatness and music of his thoughts that we can give him right to rhyme and sing that we call him a

common crowd unknown to me my king thou didst press the signet of eternity upon many a fleeting moment

The Poet often seems to contrast his life with the generality of people who live a crowded life—in making money and filling the heads with politics and have more seeming weight in the world and always humbly as though he were only sure his way is best for him

Men going home glance at me and smile and fill me with shame I sit like a beggar maid drawing my skirt over my face and when they ask me what it is I want I drop my eyes and answer them not

At another time remembering how his life had once a different shape he will say Many an hour have I spent in the strife of the good and the evil but now it is the pleasure of my playmate of the empty days to draw my heart on to him and I know not why is this sudden call to what useless inconsequence An innocence a simplicity that one does not find elsewhere in literature makes the birds and the leaves seem as near him as they are near to children

Indeed when he is speaking of children so much a part of himself this quality seems one is not certain that he is not also speaking of the saints They build their houses with sand and they play with empty shells With withered leaves they weave their boats and smilingly float them on the vast deep Children have their play on the seashore of the worlds They know not how to swim they know not how to cast nets Pearl fishes dive for pearls merchants sail in their ships while children gather pebbles and scatter them again They seek not for hidden treasures they know not how to cast nets

Tagore has familiarised us with the finest elements of Western thought and has brought about a remarkable synthesis of the culture of the East with that of the West This is particularly to be seen in his love poems He has lifted love to an imaginativ height hitherto undreamt of in Bengali poetry He has caught up the far flung radiations of the passion in the magic web of his poetry Before him there were certain

stereotyped moulds in which love was thrown to be treated more as convention than as an authentic experience There was nothing to indicate that the thrill of love had ever been felt by our earlier poets The manner in which Rabindranath transformed it and introduced into it a new fermentation a new thrill of passion is indeed wonderful and the credit is all the greater when we remember the trammels within which Bengali literature is bound He is able to give expression to a range and width of feeling a rapture and an ecstasy that seem to be quite unknown to the cramped soul of Bengal

In poet s treatment of Beauty in the abstract he combines the spiritual quality of Shelley with the sensuous quality of Keats The rich glow the fine sensuousness, the concrete imagery remind us of Keats Urvasi might be regarded the Rabindran th Hymn to the Abstract Spirit of Beauty—the counterpart of Shelley s Song of Asia But the thrilling vagueness of Shelley is substituted by a sensuousness in the manner of Keats

Rabindranath has interpreted old myths and legends endowir g them with new symbolism and significance Our old myths have become dim and vague and un s iitable to poetry beca se of their dissociation with other aspects of life *It is the credit* of Rabindranath *that he has revived* them in the light of a new inter pretation in his own inimitable way They have been *lifted to higher* imagination and sp ritu l plane If Keats is great as a Hellenistic poet Rabindran th also has instilled *the breath* of a new life over old *myths*

In the rich variety of lyrical measu es the original *tunes that the* Poet constantly strike up he is as great as Swinburne *He* is one of the very greatest lyrical poets the world has known—lyrical in thought and lyrical in command over melodies

Rabindranath s achievem nts as a great litera critic may be touched upon He is our first and fine literary critic if we e cept the few tentative efforts Babu B nkim Chandar In fact some of the

translations in English are by himself and these have been translated into several other languages Critics in Europe and America have bestowed high praise on his writings and ranked him among the great poets of the world Poetry divides itself easily into three main sections epic dramatic and lyric the three clearly demarcated and separated by wide stretches of time and the evolution of the human intellect Of these epic poetry is somewhat easy of translation but its essence is narrative Drama is comparatively difficult but the excellent renderings into English of the powerful tragedies prove that the difficulties of translation after all are not insuperable A fine lyrical poem is the despair of the translation To be fully appreciated a lyrical poem must be read in the original with due understanding of the language in which it is written It is a compact and a component whole from which no part can be separated from another The words the figures the metre are all wedded together Rabindranath has translated his poems with a phenomenal success but still it is impossible to convey in another language the grace the metrical arrangement and the musical harmony of the words of the original poems Several English admirers of the Poet also hundreds of Indian readers outside Bengal have learnt the language of Bengal to read the works of the Bengali Poet as originally written The late Gopal Krishna Gokhale the well known Indian politician and mathematician also learnt the Bengali language for the express purpose of reading Rabindranath s poems in the original Bengali

An English critic of Tagore has likened him to Victor Hugo Comparisons between two writers in two different languages are often not helpful for constructive criticism At times it may have the merit of suggestion The similarity between the French and the Indian writers is in their versatility and range of creative genius Both are masters of prose and verse both are writers of prose fiction both have written dramatic and lyrical poetry both are child lovers and have tendered the homage of exquisite

song to the sovereignty of childhood But the students of literature will not fail to observe that the two writers belong to two divergent schools Tennyson has rightly called Victor Hugo Stormy Voice of France The great French poet was Lord of human tears The muse of the Indian Poet moves in the glory of early dawn and seeks the gathering shadows of evening She finds her pleasure not in the storm and stress but in the smiling beauties of Nature She listens to the voice of the sandal scented wind from the south and knocks gently at the door of the human heart The genius of Victor Hugo was not only dramatic but even melodramatic He was a master of the big bow wow style Rabindranath in his later writings has touched spiritual heights seldom reached by any poet

No estimate of Rabindranath s life and works would be complete without touching upon his philosophy of the Infinite The Poet never loses sight of the Infinite in the finite the Unlimited in the limited This is interwoven in the warp and woof of his writings

In his famous novel *Gora* he makes Gora the hero of the piece speak thus

Unless there be finite the Infinite cannot express itself It is through the finite that the Infinite manifests itself

Again in another passage the Poet sings

Within the finite Oh Thou Infinite Thou playest Thy own tune Hence so rapturously sweet is Thy manifestation in me

The Poet has found in *music* the manifestation of the Infinite through the finite The passage last quoted is an illustration in his masterpiece *Chitrangada*

As in a song in a momentary rhythm there is as if a mystical echo from the Eternal

There is a parallel idea in another of his songs

The mind cannot approach Him But music soars higher and kisses His throne

This is the Poet s faith in music which brings him such a beatific vision as we see in the following